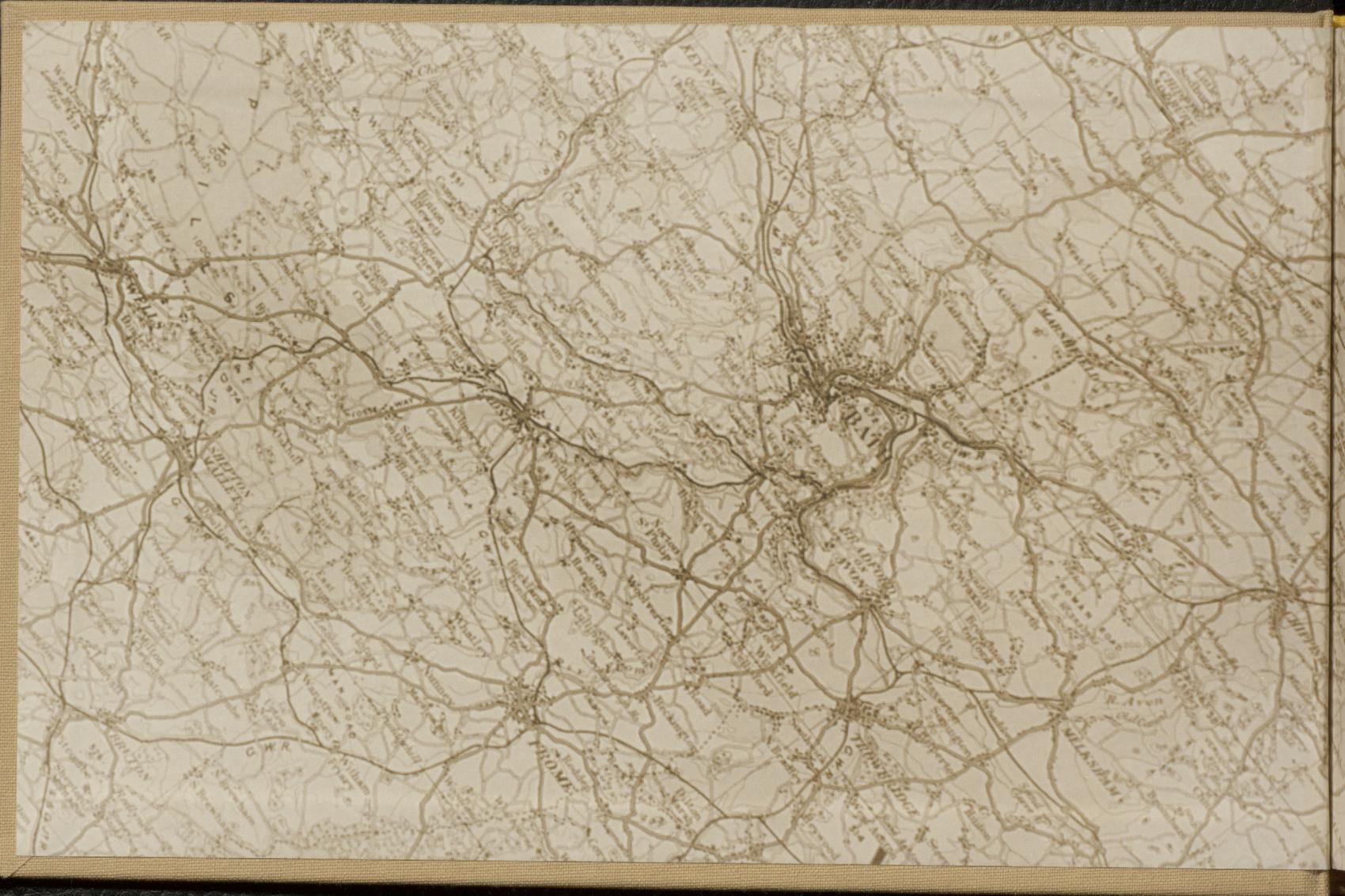
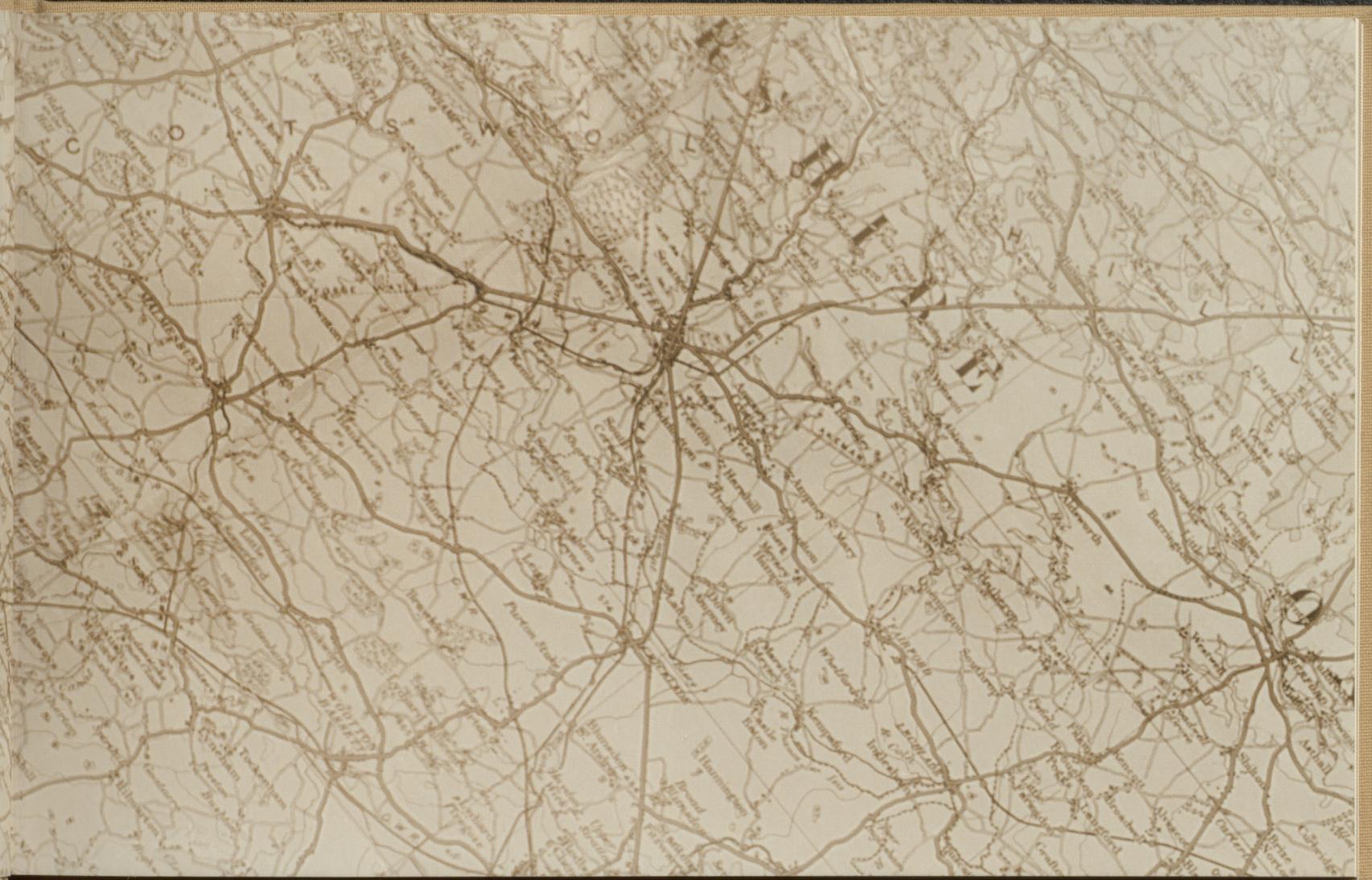


John Bland  
English Travel Sketchbook





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John Bland  
English Travel Sketchbook



# John Bland English Travel Sketchbook

John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection  
McGill University  
Montréal, Québec  
2003

Legal Deposit: 2nd trimester 2003  
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This facsimile of John Bland's Travel Sketchbook has been made  
possible with the generous assistance of the R H W Foundation.

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## Preface

The gentle minde by gentle deeds is known;  
For a man by nothing is so well bewrayed  
As by his manners.

Edmund Spenser

In the early 1970s, when John Bland (1911-2002) brought to the attic in the Redpath Library what looked like a giant bird's nest of architectural drawings, he wasn't just cleaning house. He was stepping down after thirty years as the first Canadian-born director of the McGill School of Architecture. Quietly he sought to honour the legacy of his predecessors - Percy Erskine Nobbs and Ramsay Traquair - by preserving their personal and professional archives. Gradually, Bland added other architectural *fonds*: the work of architects Edward & W. S. Maxwell and John Archibald; the projects of his students, Arthur Erickson and Moshe Safdie; along with many others. Today, the collection that now proudly bears its founder's name is no longer the array of *disjecta membra* that once packed the Nobbs Room, but a hive of activity by McGill students, researchers, and heritage experts. Here, courses on the History of Canadian Architecture and Heritage Preservation are taught, here lost Montreal buildings are studied based on actual documentation, and here even the eclectic furnishings designed by

architects "archived" in the Bland Collection stand as vivid reminders of the significance with which architectural records can inform our historic understanding of built work.

In his discreet and unostentatious way, John Bland laboured to preserve more than seventy architectural collections - some 200,000 plans, drawings, photographs, models, and books. Today these form part of the McGill Libraries. Many have been made accessible in an electronic form as well. Not surprisingly, however, the only *fonds* to which John Bland paid scant attention was his own. His life-long, painstaking search to understand and validate the work of others left little scope for self-documentation. Therefore, we were delighted to learn that a delicate travel sketchbook of his student years had been discovered among his papers after his death and would be generously donated to McGill by his wife and children. I can think of no nobler tribute to his exemplary life than making available to his students, friends, and colleagues this closely-observed, subtly rendered record of the architecture of a small corner of the picturesque Cotswold Hills.

I am deeply grateful to Fay Bland and her children - Clara, Andrew, John, and Harry- for their continued support of the McGill Libraries and of the collection begun by their husband and father; to David Covo, for his sensitive introduction to the context and the images from the Bland travel sketchbook; to Linda Graif and Andrew Ensslen for their

help with the production of the facsimile; to Marilyn Berger, Head, Blackader-Lauterman Library of Architecture and Art; and to the RHW Foundation for the financial support of this publication.

Dr. Irena Murray  
Chief Curator  
Rare Books and Special Collections  
John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection  
McGill University Libraries

## Introduction

Why do architects sketch when they travel? If the image of an architect hunched over a drawing pad or a sketchbook in some foreign place seems familiar, it is because we have been doing this for centuries.<sup>1</sup> The popular notion that the sketchbook provides an alternative to the camera - as a means of documenting experience before the development of photography - may have been true in the nineteenth century, but it does not explain why the sketchbook has survived as an essential item in our carry-on baggage, despite the availability of the camera and a tantalizing array of digital imaging devices.

Asked why we continue to pack both our camera and our drawing materials when we travel, some architects might refer to the example of architects such as le Corbusier, who wrote that the purpose of making travel sketches is "...to fix deep down in one's experience what is seen...to look, and then to observe, and finally perhaps to discover."<sup>2</sup> The rituals associated with travel sketching provide an intellectual and physical framework for our encounters with new environments. Making drawings defines a relationship with a place that is simply not possible, at least for most people, with mechanical forms of documentation that come between the observer and the subject. The act of drawing takes time, whether measured in minutes or hours, and the drawings that we produce record not only what we see but also how we think; they are the evidence of a process - a search for meaning - in which knowledge is acquired and understanding of the world is developed.

This publication is a facsimile of a sketchbook completed by John Bland, probably in the mid-thirties, when he was a graduate student in Town Planning at the Architectural Association in London. The sketchbook was discovered with a collection of other papers shortly after his death in March 2002. Neither his family nor his recent collaborators recall having seen it before, and no one can explain why it remained buried all this time, almost seventy years. Whether private, like a personal diary, or simply forgotten in a box with other material from his time in England, the book provides a remarkable glimpse of the early years of what would become a long and distinguished career.

The drawings fall into two groups. The first consists of fifteen pages, mostly streetscapes and buildings, with studies of furniture, structure and architectural details. The sites named define a more or less diagonal line, running southwest to northeast and measuring roughly one hundred kilometres in length, between the town of Wells at the lower end and Burford at the upper. The tour seems to start in Wells - although the only reference to that place is a thumbnail sketch of a barn, one of a series of light drawings on p. 7 identified as 'memory sketches' - and apparently ends in Burford. This first collection of drawings may document one trip or possibly a series of excursions from London. Most of the places visited lie along the eastern edge of the Cotswold Hills, and some of them - Cirencester, a Roman town, and the tiny communities of Siddington and Ampney Crucis - are within two or three kilometres of each other, an

easy walking distance for a young man in his mid-twenties.

The second group consists of twelve pages of sketches that include the legs of tables and chairs from Nash's family mansions along with other furniture and numerous studies of architectural wrought iron work and ecclesiastical artefacts in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

All of the sketches are in pencil, although the drawings of religious objects and other metalwork in the second group have been further developed with a sepia wash; the wash, which may have been applied later, clarifies complex forms and expresses the metallic finish of the objects presented. The sketches are without exception meticulously drawn, with great confidence and little or no evidence of erasures.

The subject matter is rich and diverse. Bland's interest in the architecture of the village streetscape is clear; he studies materials and textures, structure and form, composition and proportion, and seems particularly drawn to the special nature of windows and entrance doorways. But he is also interested in furniture; one drawing on page 11, a carefully dimensioned perspective of a chair in Siddington, enjoys the additional distinction of being the only sketch in which white has been added to render reflections of light on the polished wood surfaces. Elsewhere in the sketchbook, many other subjects - embroidery in a Cirencester church, possibly part of a tapestry, chickens in a farmyard in Norton St. Philip, a weather cock, a spit jack and fireplace toasters,

door knockers, chalices and all the trappings of the church service - compete for and receive his attention. Whether exploring an English country lane or a corridor in the Victoria and Albert, Bland was not so much easily as willingly distracted.

The drawings on pages 10 and 12 of barns and stables in Siddington and Ampney Crucis express a special interest in the elegant timber and stone structures of the countryside. Perspective sketches, sections, a corner detail and studies of heavy timber roof trusses share the pages with notes that pose questions and suggest answers, that speculate on the origin of vernacular roof forms and the significance of rounded corners in dry stone walls. It is in these pages that the sketchbook is in some ways most convincing; it is here that it most clearly reveals itself as a journal, presenting images of objects and buildings along with ideas about the origins of forms and the nature of materials.

The subject matter also dramatizes an important difference between this sketchbook and the more traditional notebooks that Bland's contemporaries would have kept to document their own explorations of Paris, Rome, Athens and other sites on the normal European tour. There are no monuments here, no images of St. Paul's or Trafalgar Square or Westminster Abbey. There are no views of interior spaces. And, perhaps most significantly, although there are numerous carefully drawn cross-sections - mainly studies of structural framing - there are no floor plans.

We do not find in Bland's drawings, as in Louis Kahn's travel sketchbooks of 1928 and 1929,<sup>3</sup> a preview of issues and ideas that would later surface in his built work. What we discover instead is a series of exquisite drawings that provide a surprisingly clear preview of what would become a life-long interest in the vernacular, in the anonymous architecture of town and streetscape, in the extraordinary craftsmanship expressed in the work of ordinary carpenters and metal-smiths.

The sketchbook illustrates an approach to drawing that was surely the product of his education at McGill and in particular, of his experience with the tradition of the summer Sketching School, which had been introduced into the curriculum in 1921. Irena Murray has suggested that Bland's interest in the vernacular may also be seen as the direct legacy of his studies with Professor Ramsay Traquair, Director of the School of Architecture between 1913 and 1939, who found in the buildings and carvings of the Quebec countryside the foundation of a distinctly Canadian architecture. It was Traquair, in fact, who had led the second Sketching School to Toronto and Kingston, probably in 1922, at which time both sketching and measured drawing were part of the course.

Although the sketchbook itself would not surface until after his death, elements of the drawings and the ideas expressed in them would reappear decades later on the blackboards of the School of Architecture and in the notebooks of stu-

dents in the course that he developed and taught for many years, History of Architecture in Canada, the first of its kind in this country. When he spoke of the work of craftsmen as emotionally and aesthetically appealing, of expression and utility as generating the form of everyday objects, of chairs and chair rails and naturally bent timber frames in buildings and ships, the connection between the images in the sketchbook and new ways of thinking about the world appears as a clear and unbroken line between England and Montreal.

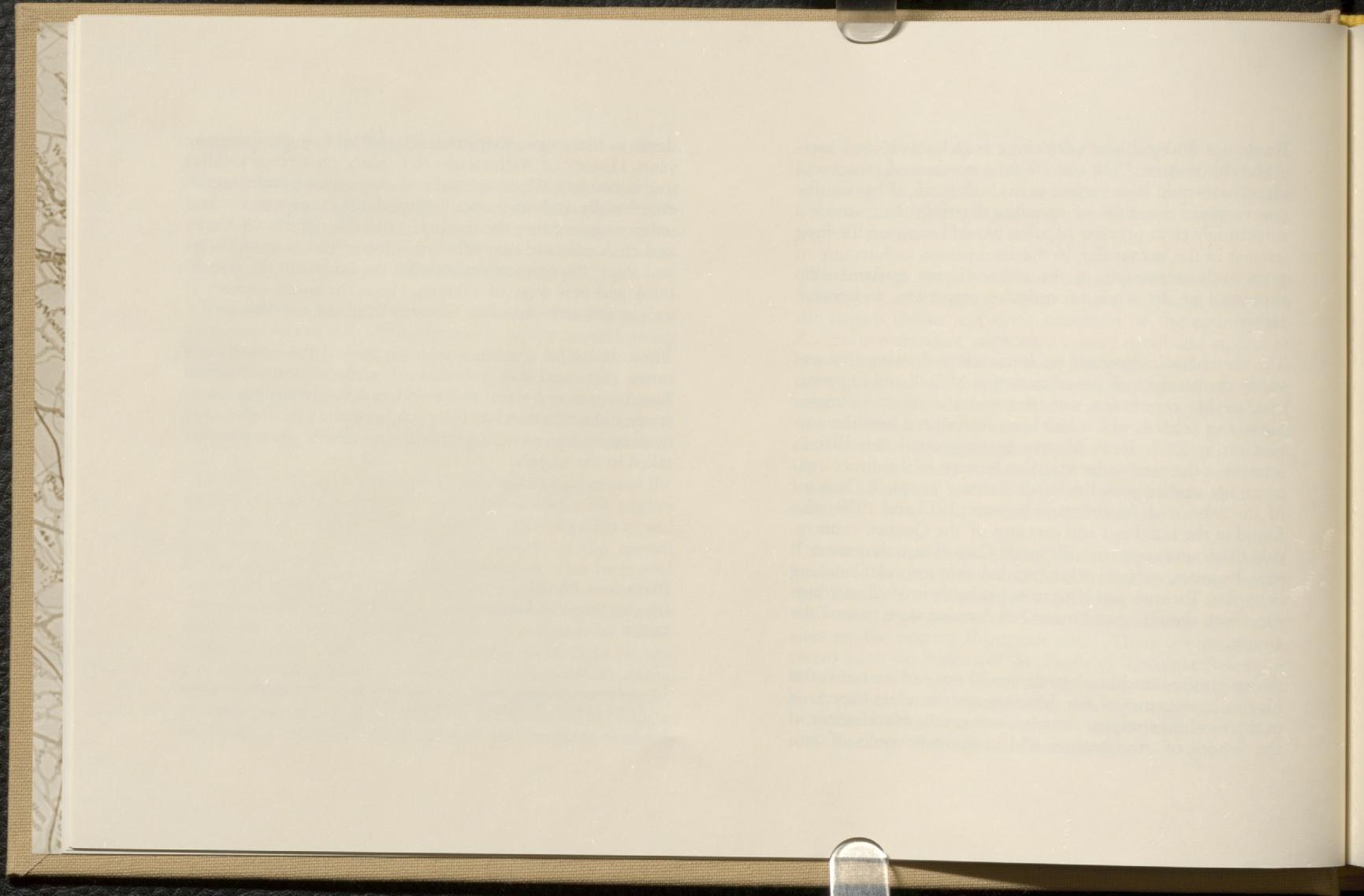
These beautiful drawings, with occasional dimensions and notes that read like snatches of conversations, confirm Bland's curiosity about the world and his determination to study and understand it. They celebrate the act of discovery in drawing but more importantly, reveal the great pleasure taken in the search.

David Covo, FRAIC  
Director, School of Architecture  
McGill University

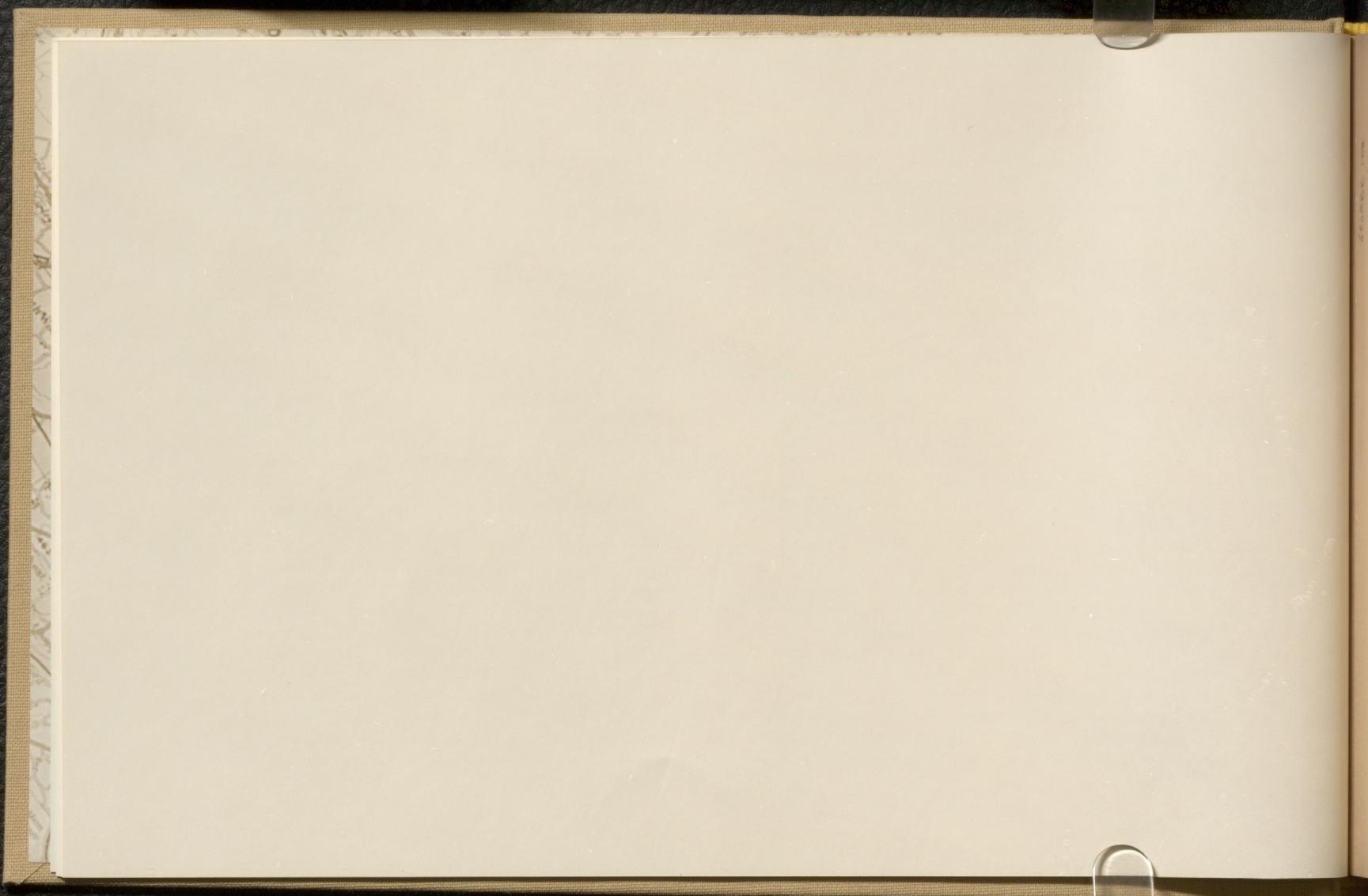
<sup>1</sup> Eugene Johnson, "Sketching Abroad", in *Drawn from the Source: The Travel Sketches of Louis I. Kahn* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

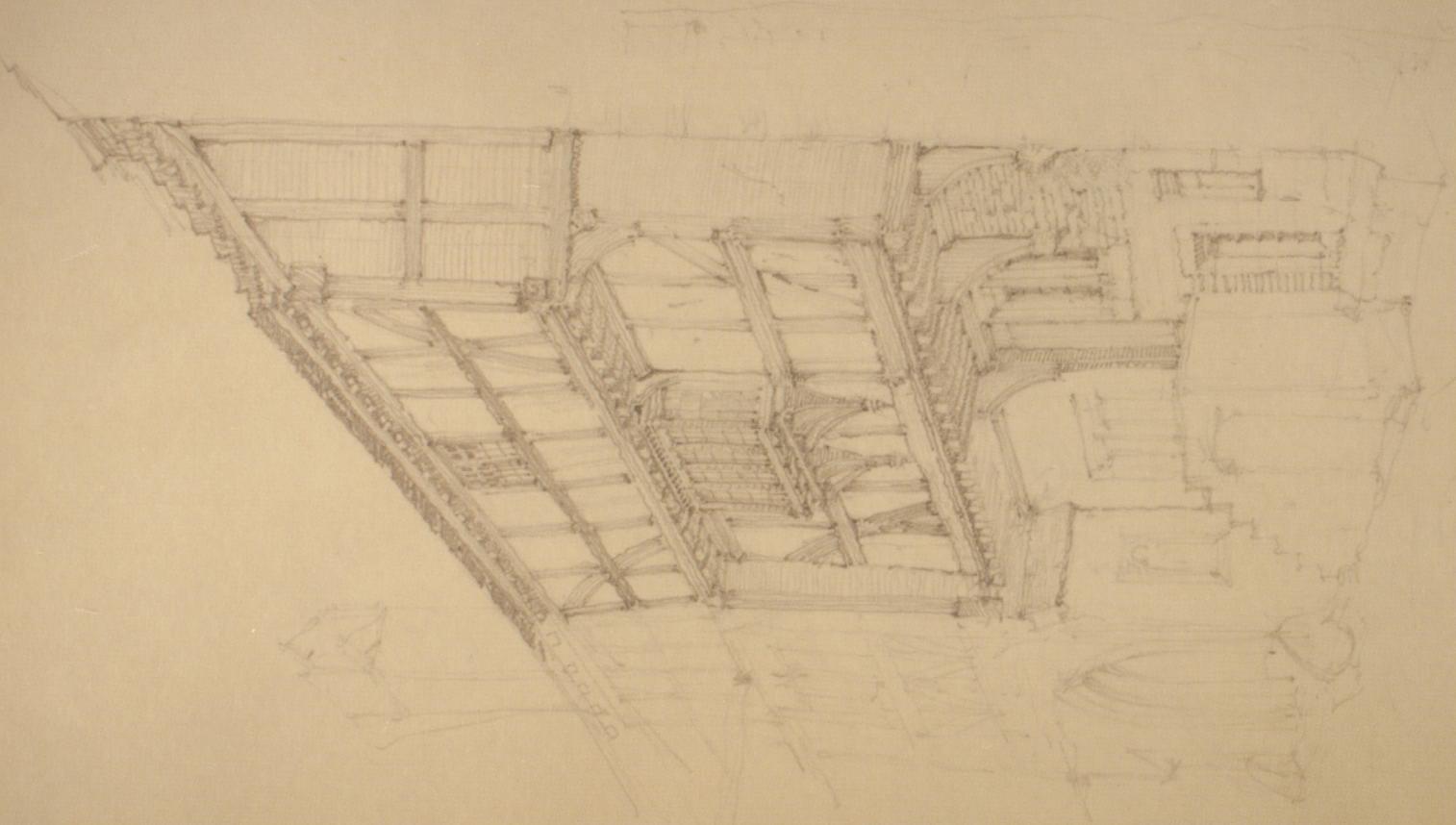




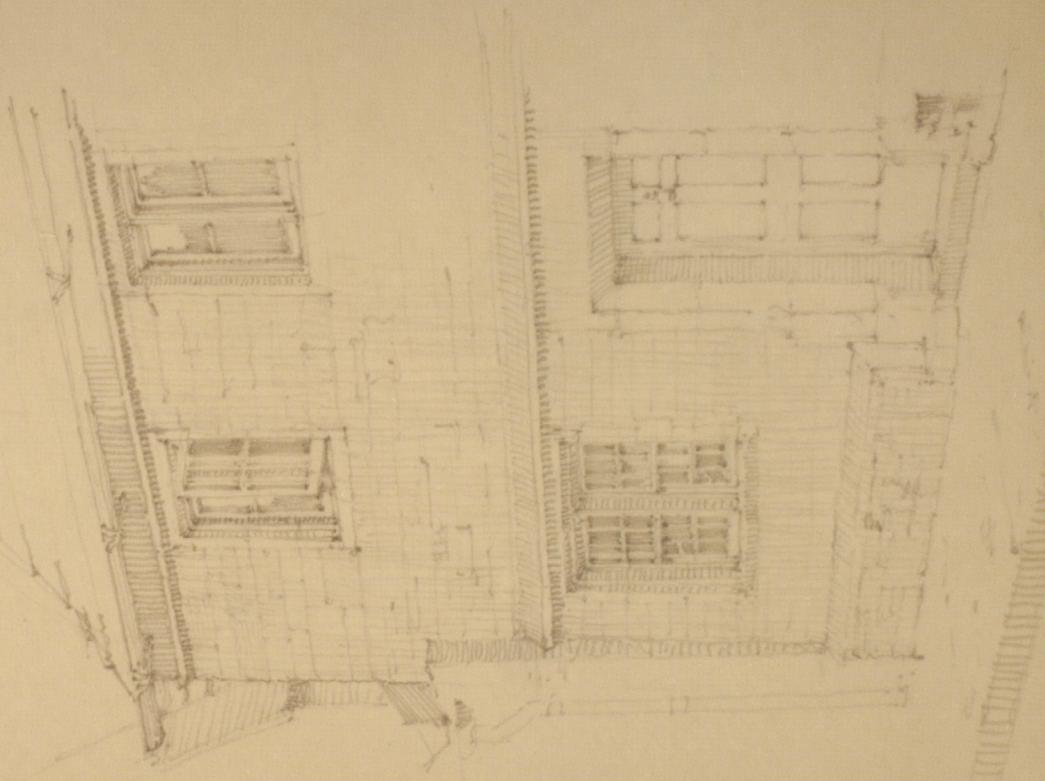


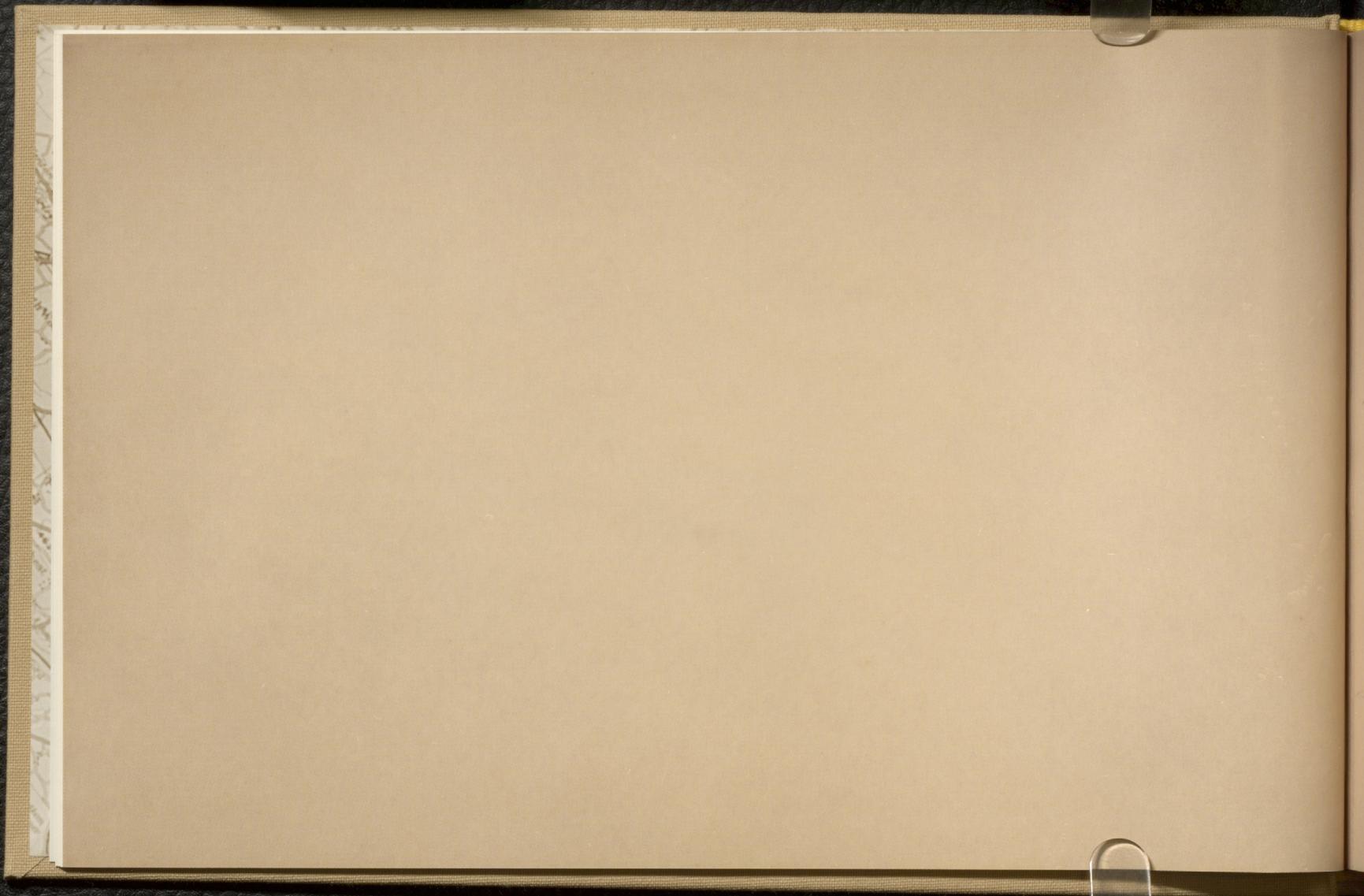
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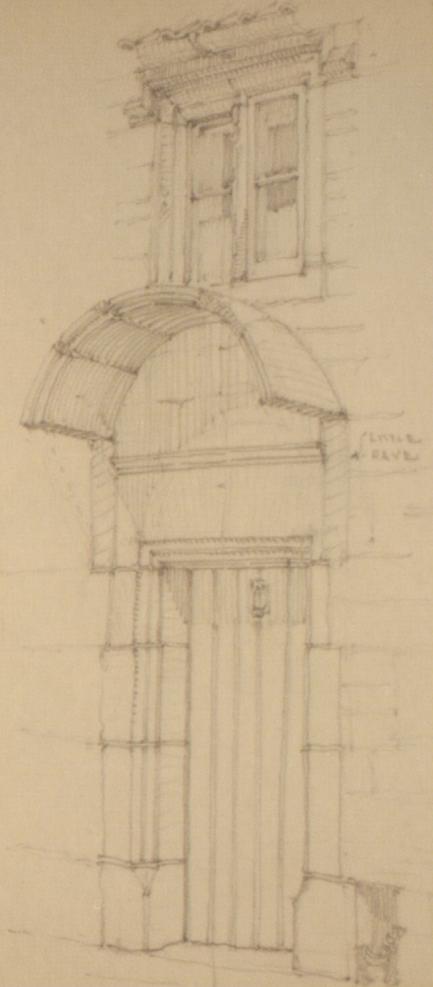
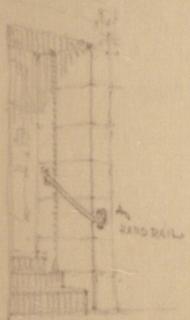


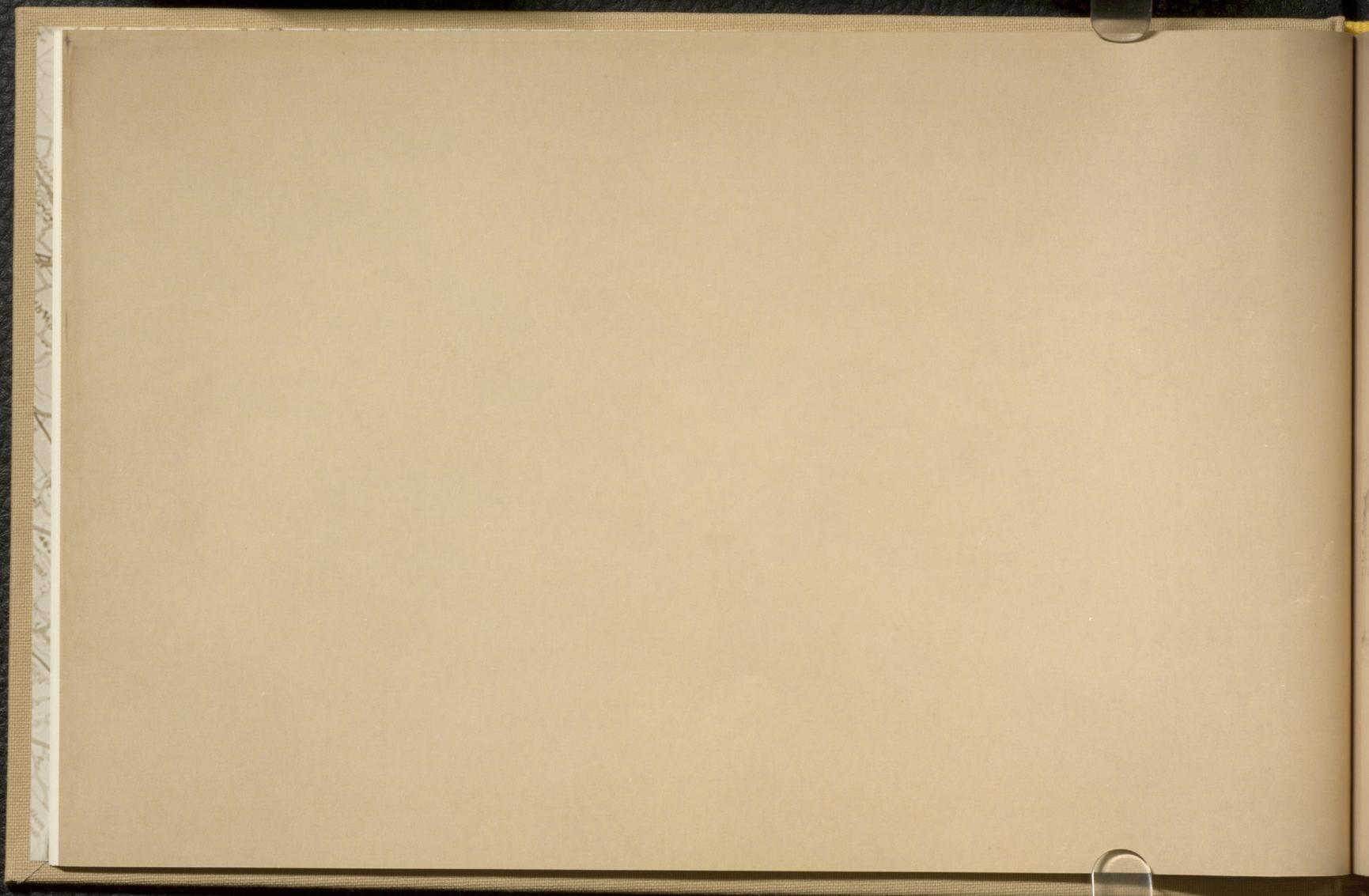




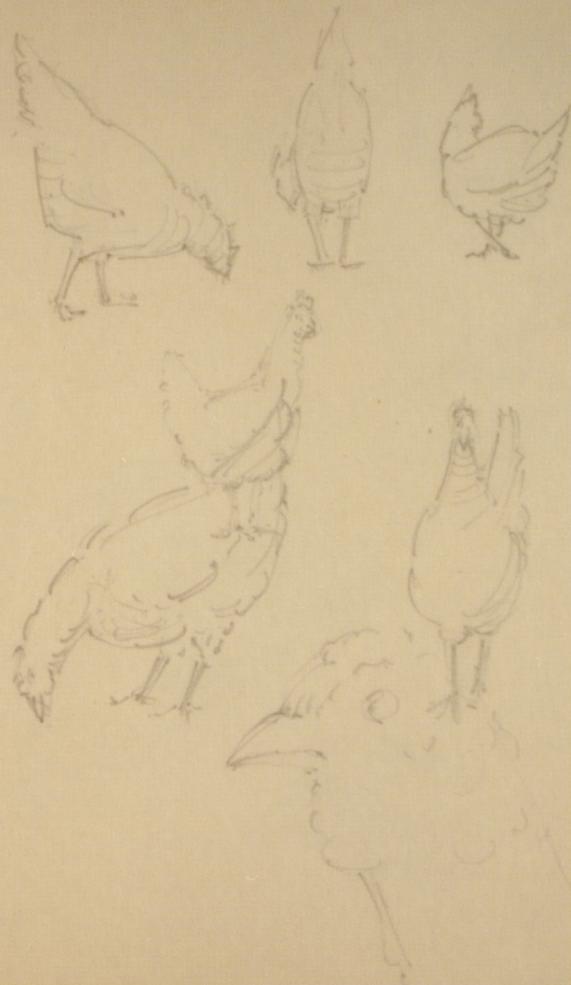


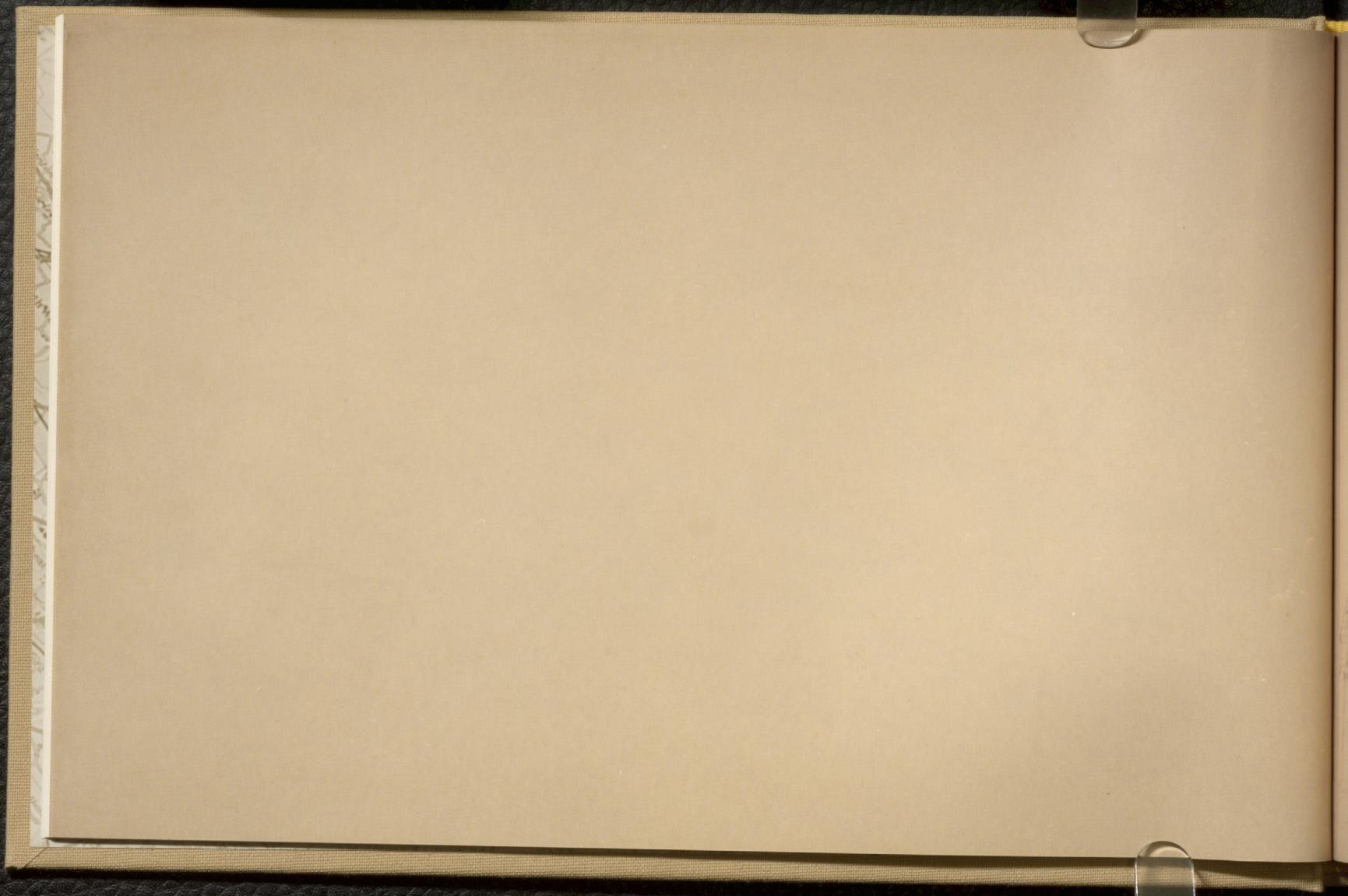
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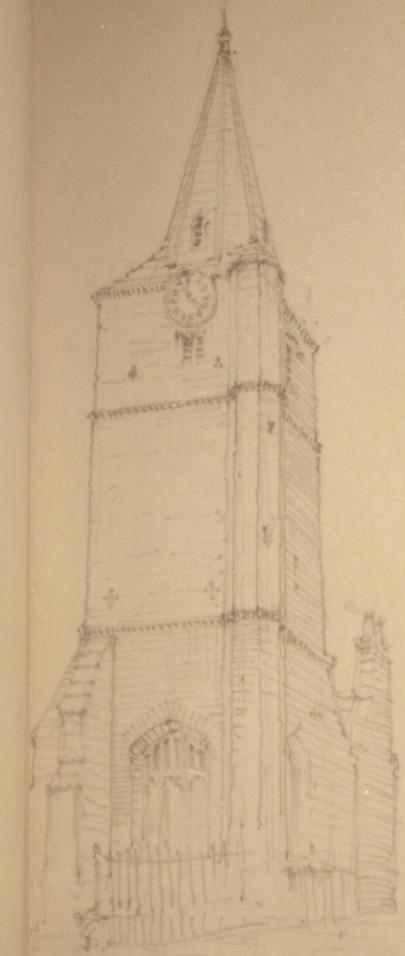




NORTON S.P.







BELL TOWER. MALMESBRY.



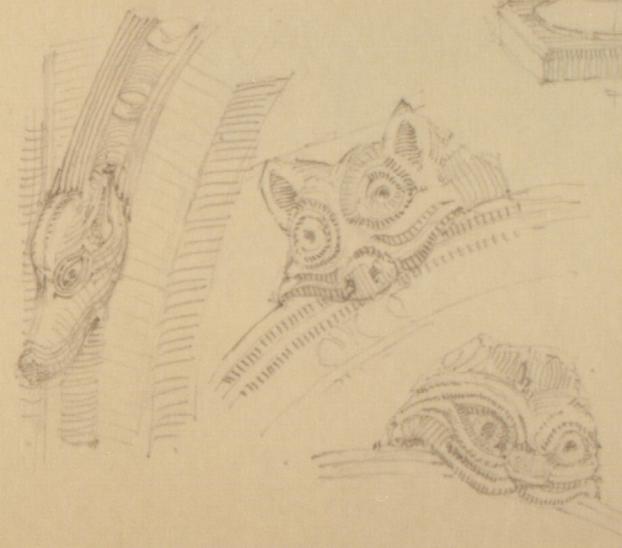
STO. MALMESBRY.

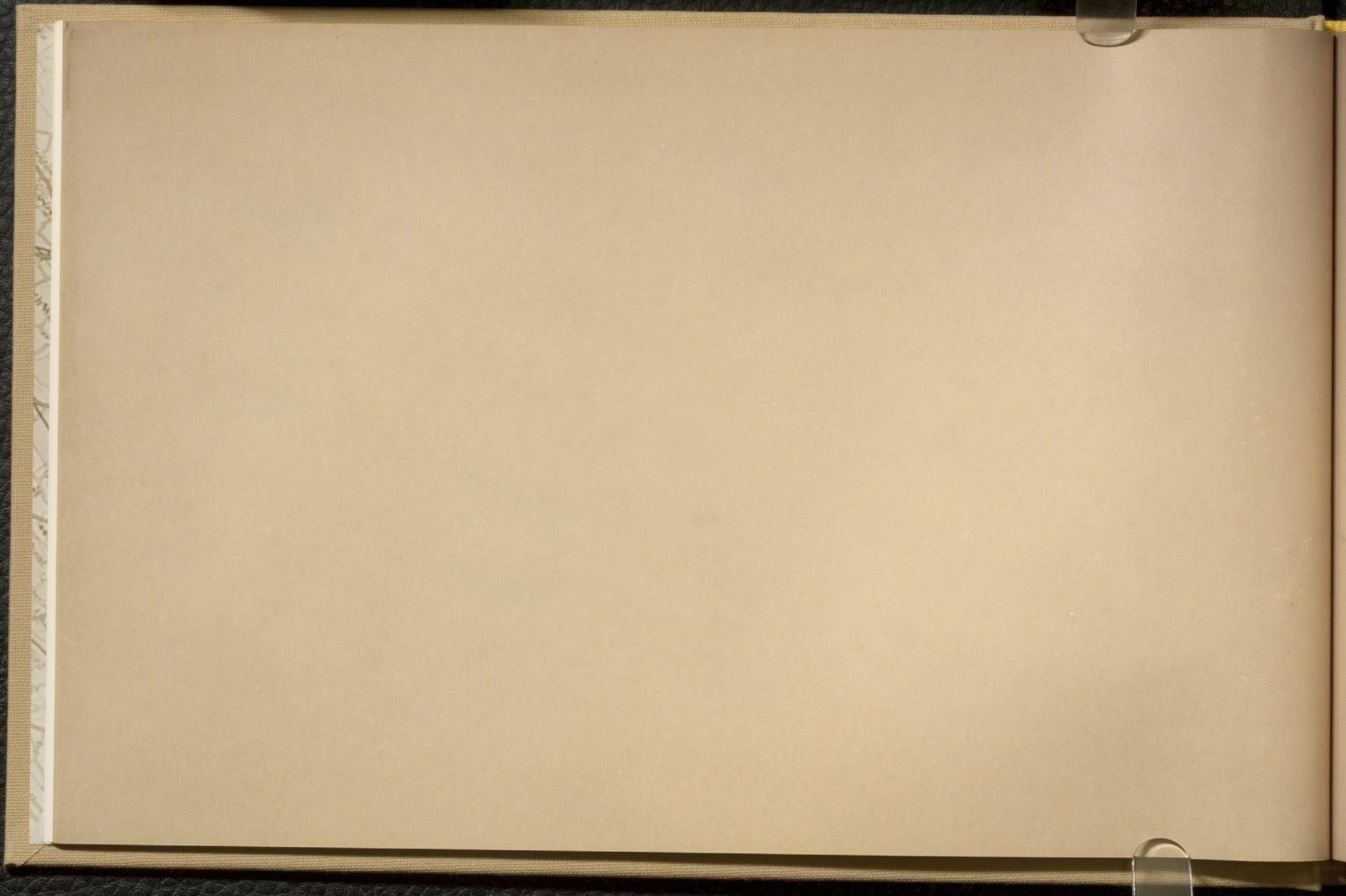


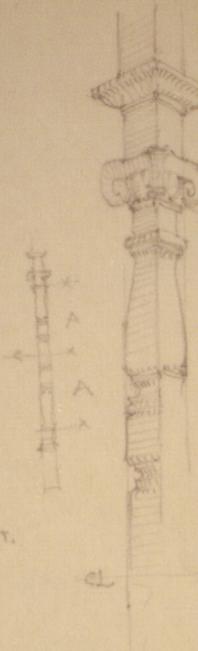
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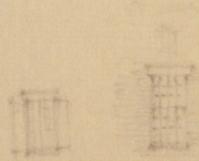
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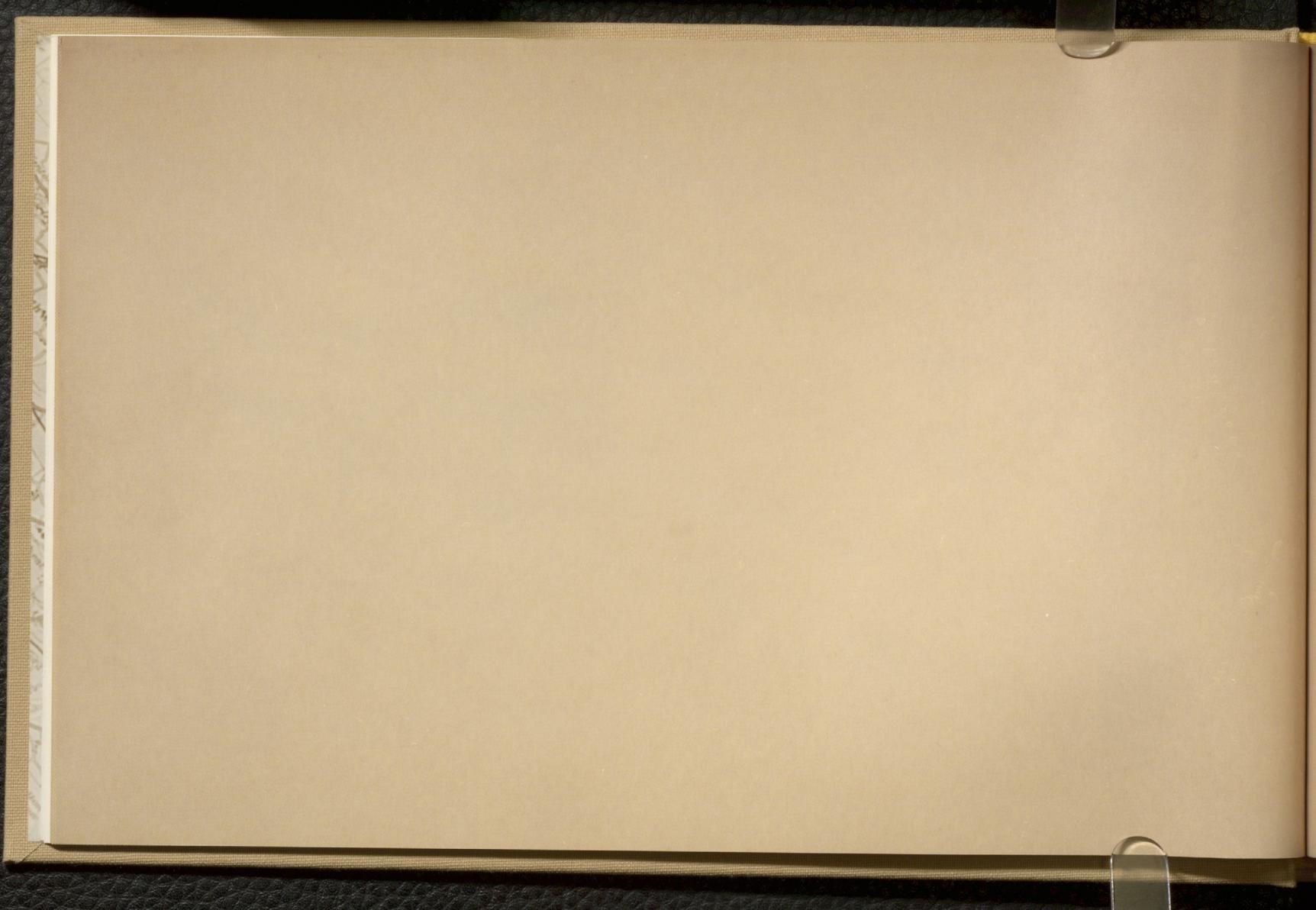




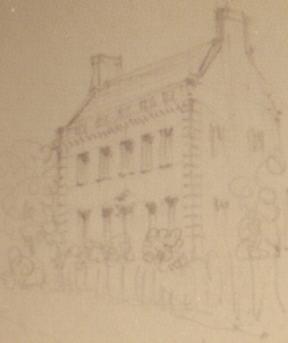


WILMINGTON





SKETCHES -



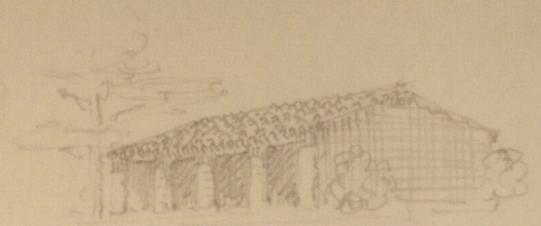
HOUSE, NEAR CHARLTON



HOUSE NEAR MALHESSY.



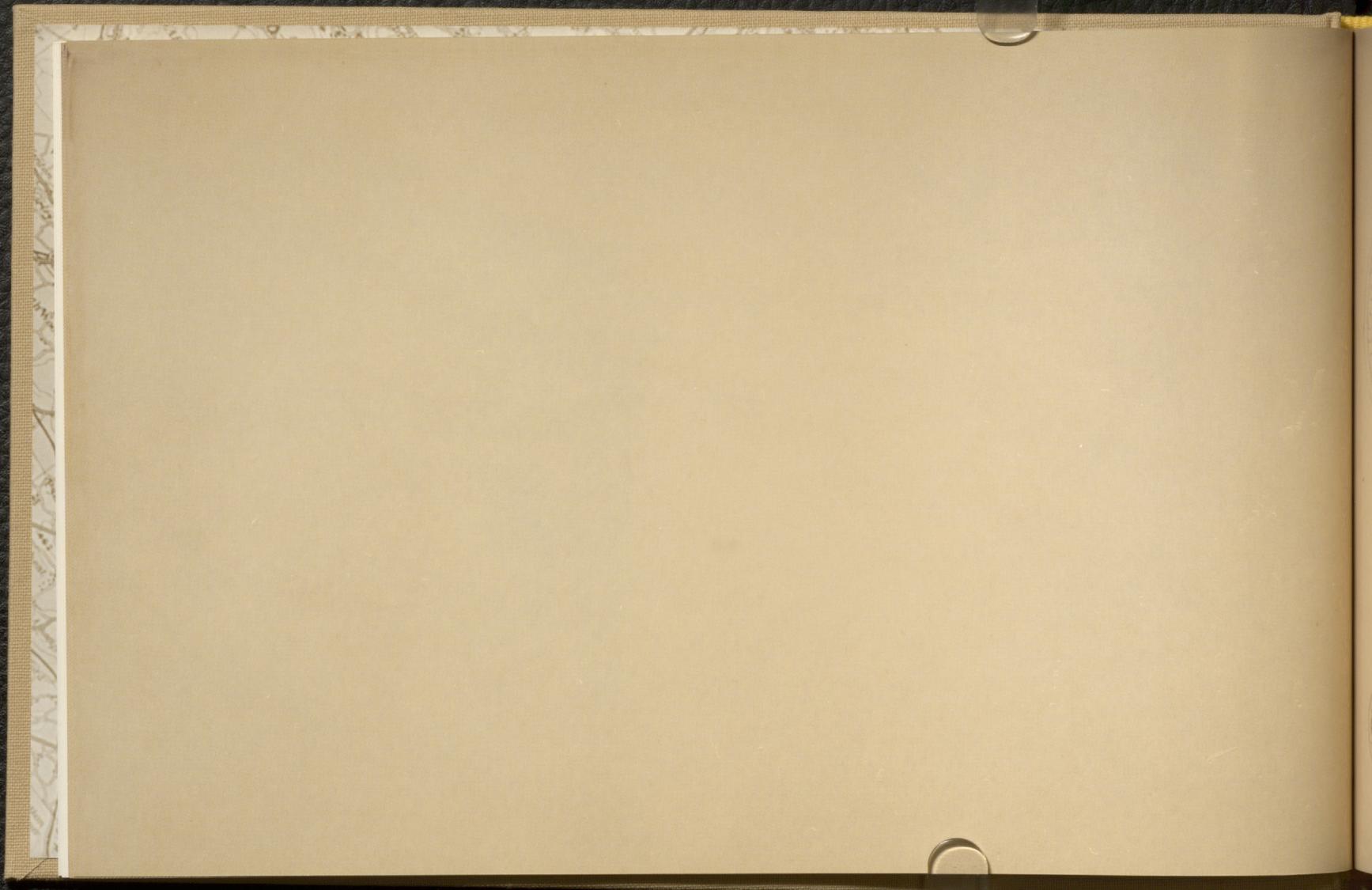
BARN YARD TOWER.

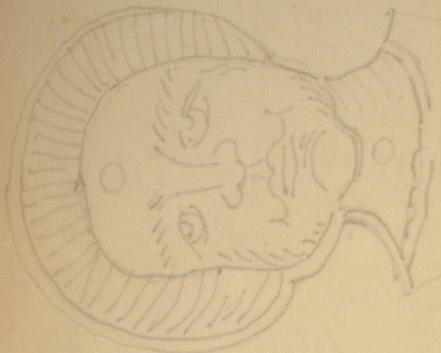


BARN NEAR WELLS.

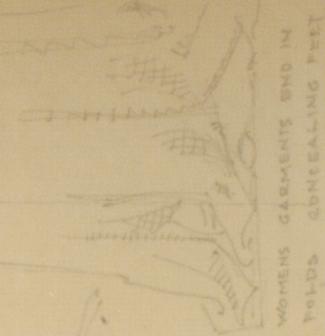


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Y.M.C.A.

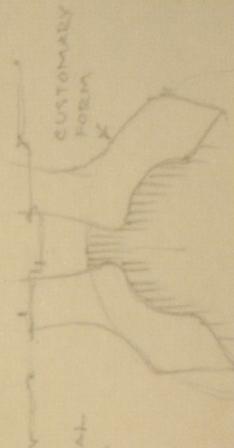
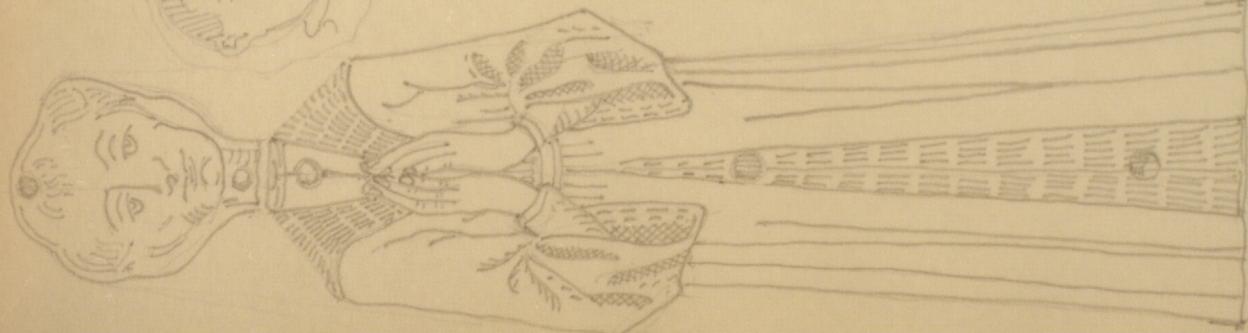




men have round  
faces unshaven have  
long mustaches  
male waist-line is  
white the female  
waist line is  
and fair below the  
breast



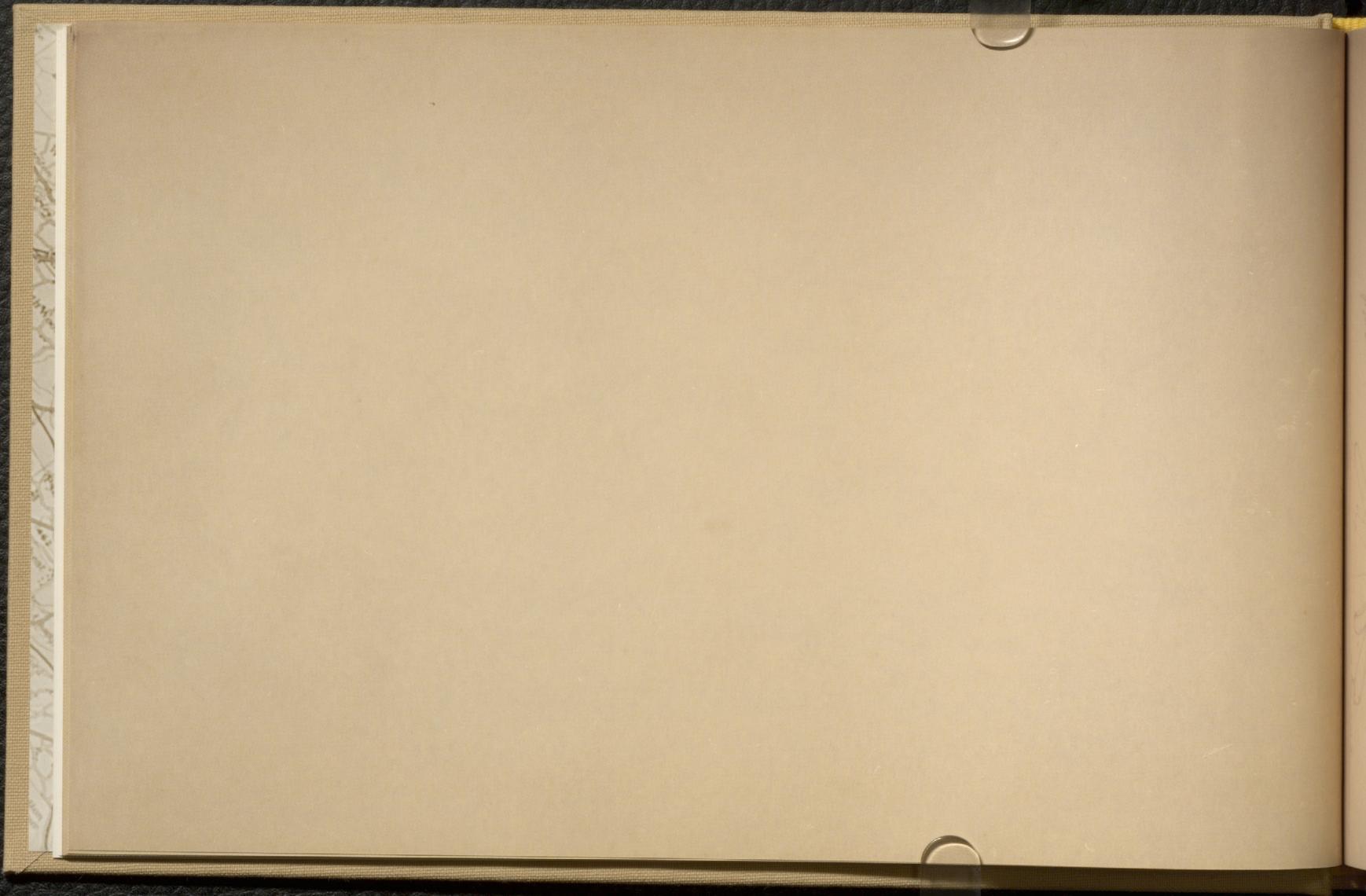
WOMEN'S GARMENTS AND THE  
FOLDS CONCEALING FEET



CUSTOMARY  
FOLDS



FAIR, FEET SHOWN



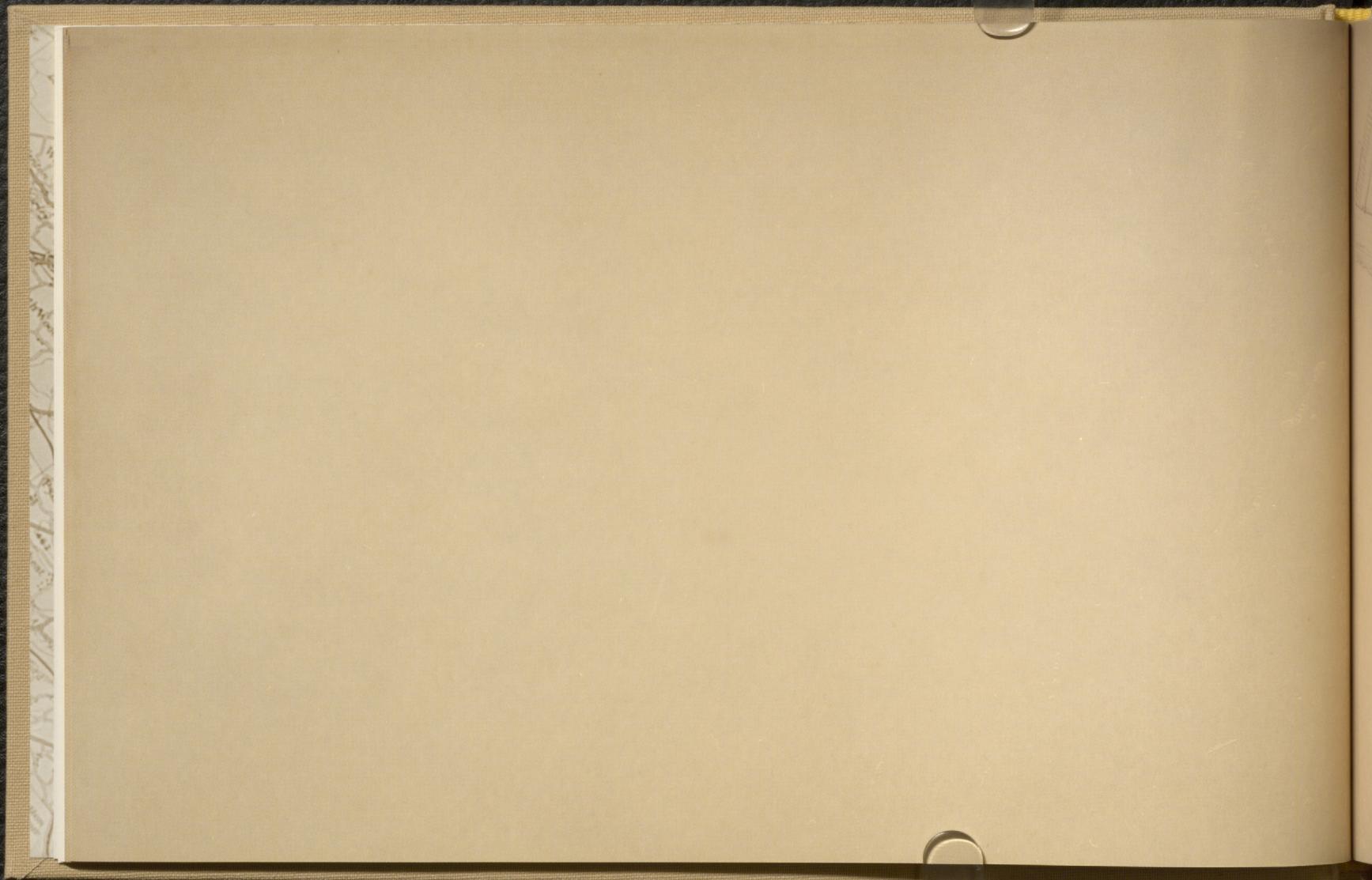


showing all done with

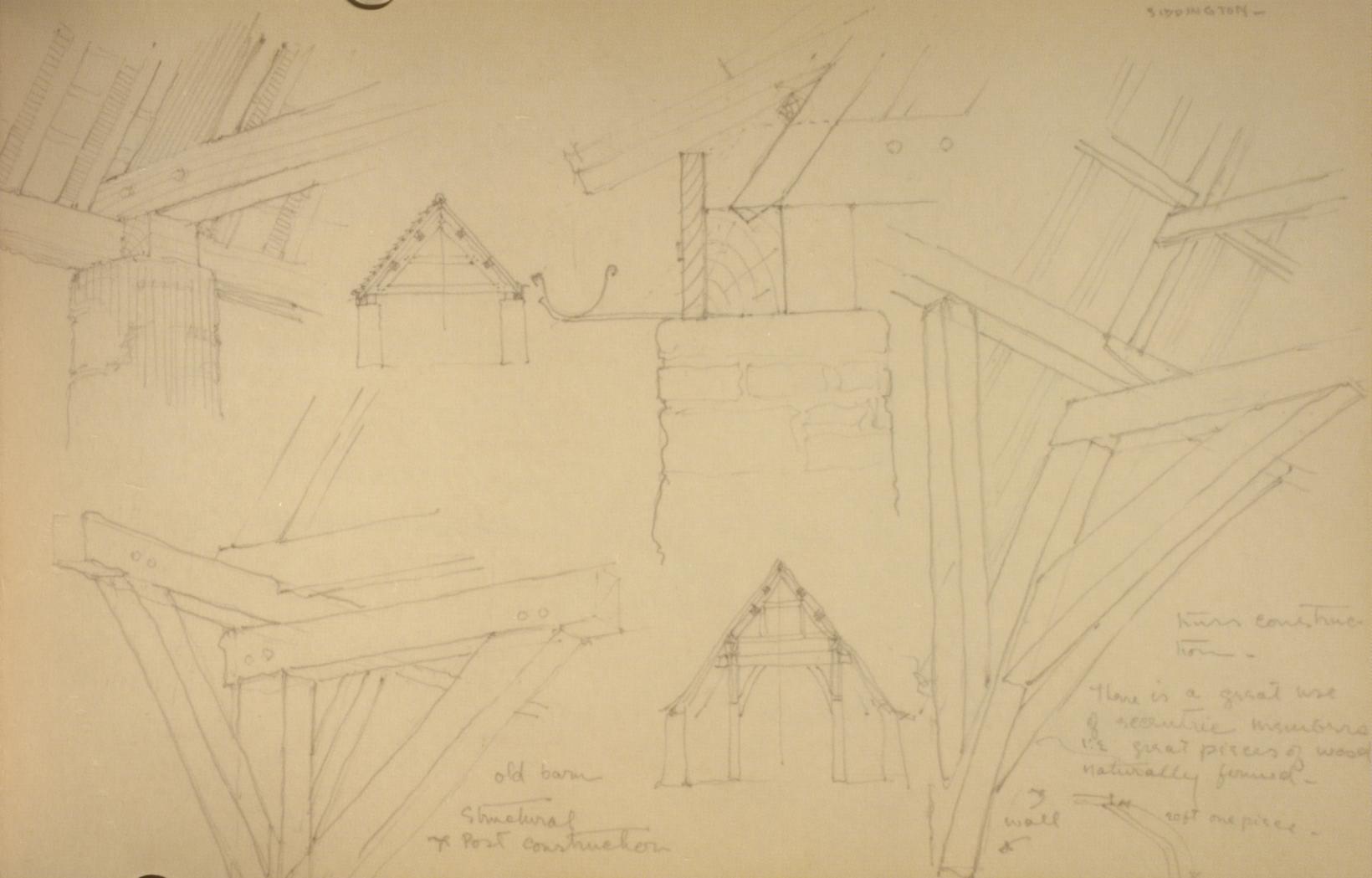
honey colored thread outlined  
where one part is shown above  
another a black thread is used  
as well

The face and hair is shown  
in black. The frontlets on the  
shoulders of the wings also.  
The h script worn area in black  
colours -

The frontlet in addition to  
the parts done in gold  
are not shown but  
added - There appears to  
be something under -  
with



BRIDGING TORS...

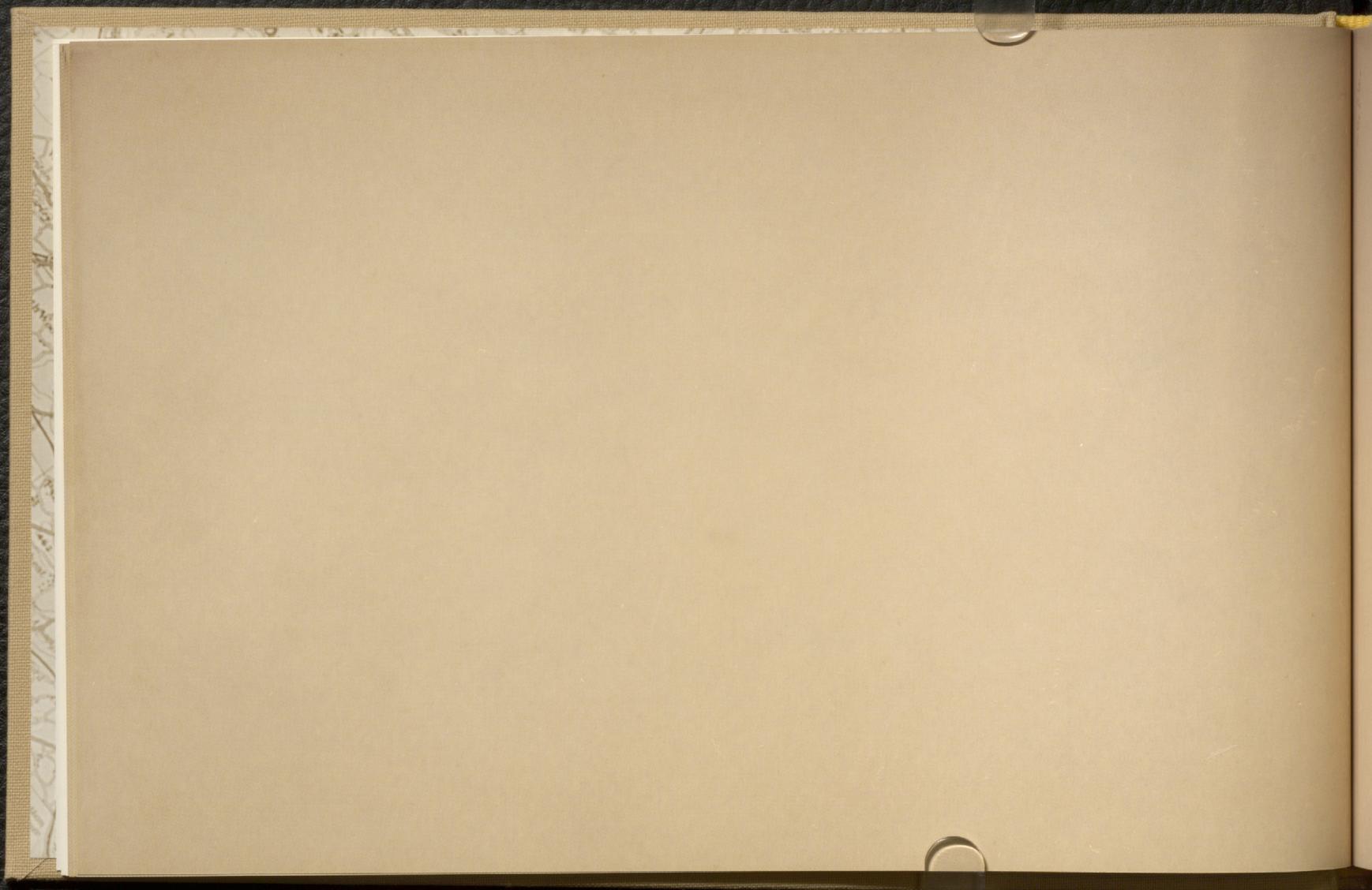


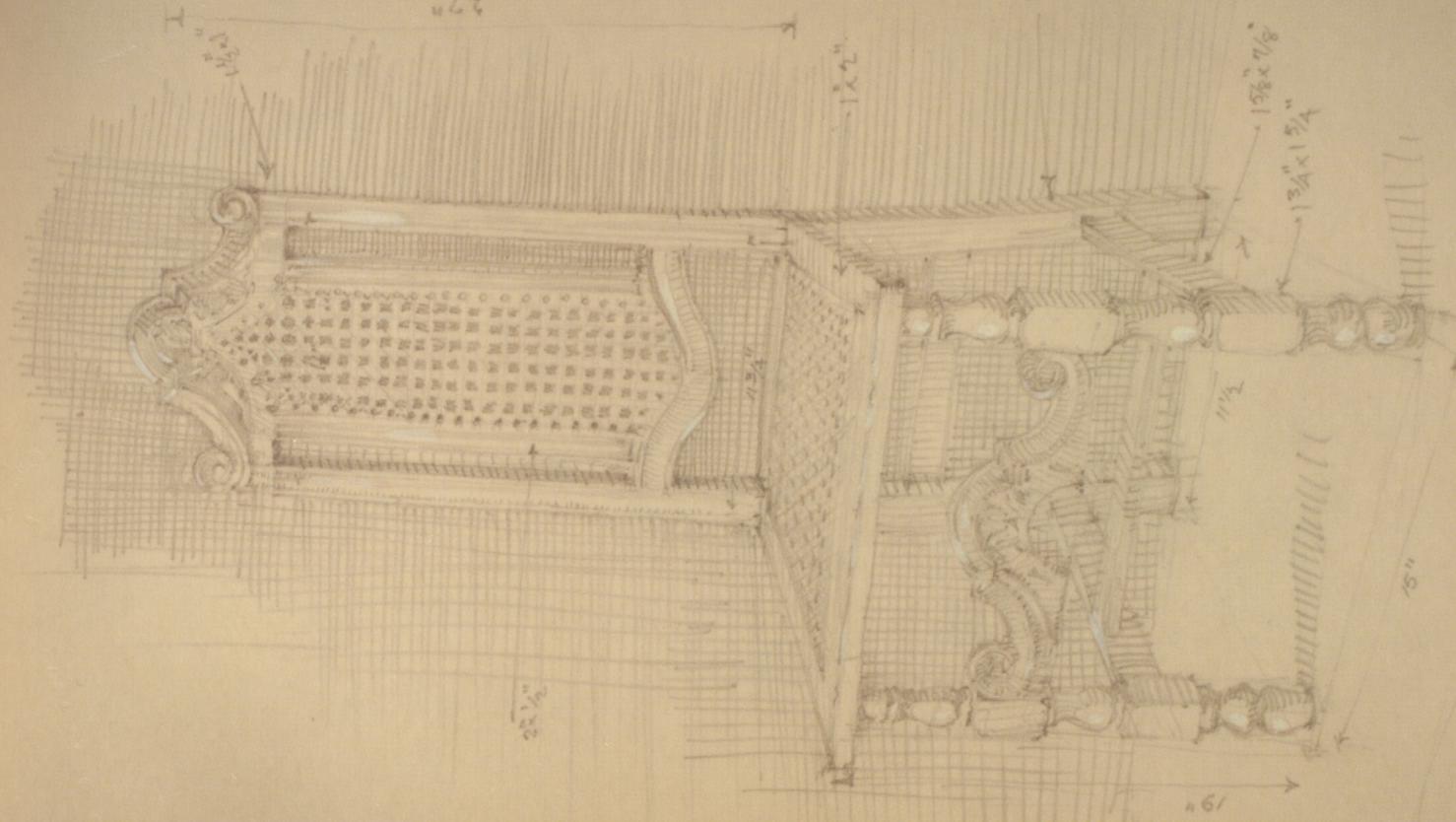
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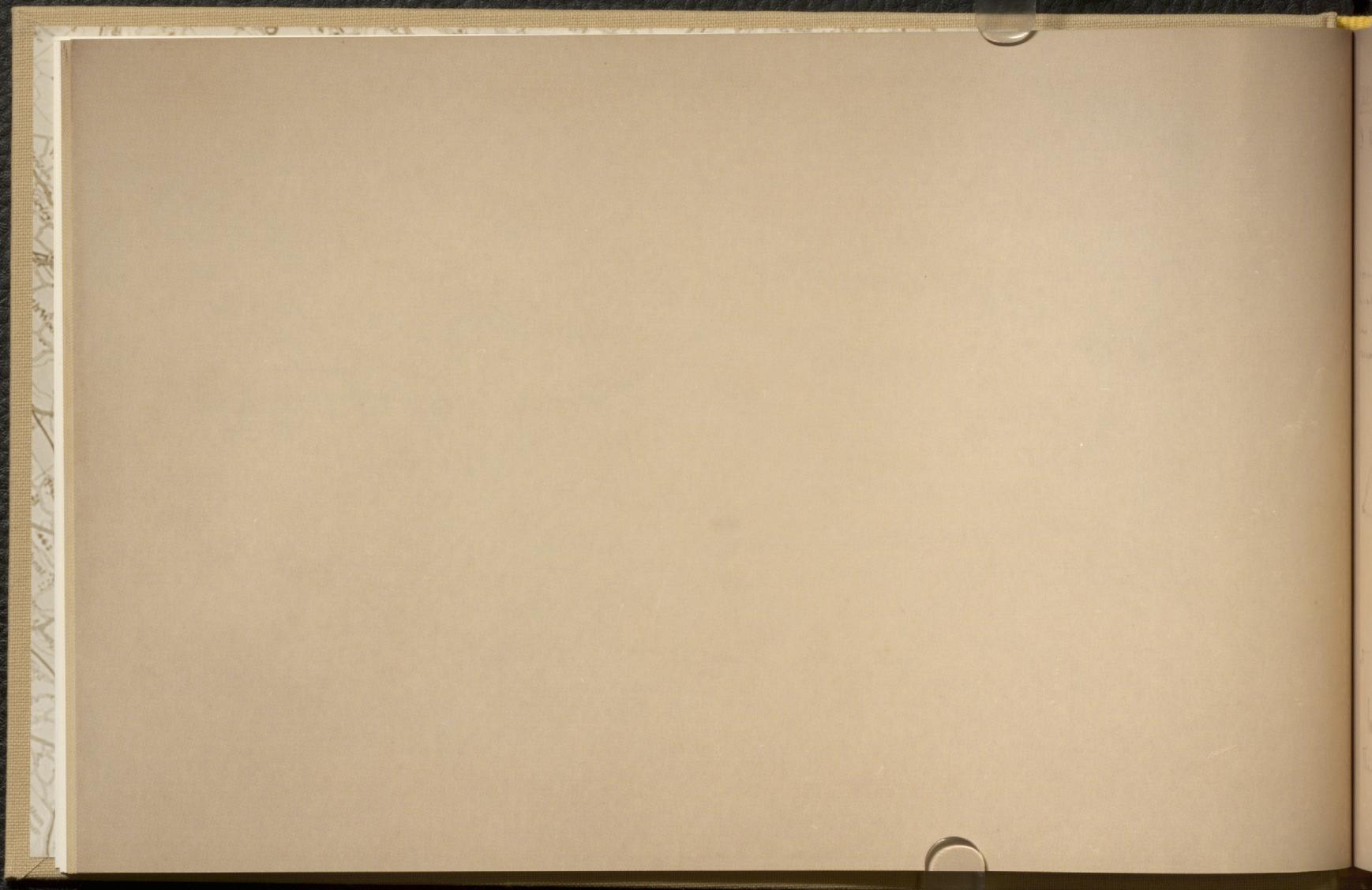
There is a great use  
of eccentric members  
using great pieces of wood  
naturally formed

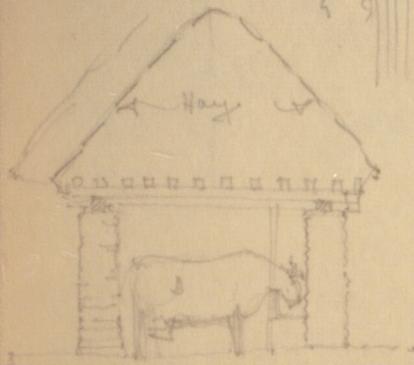
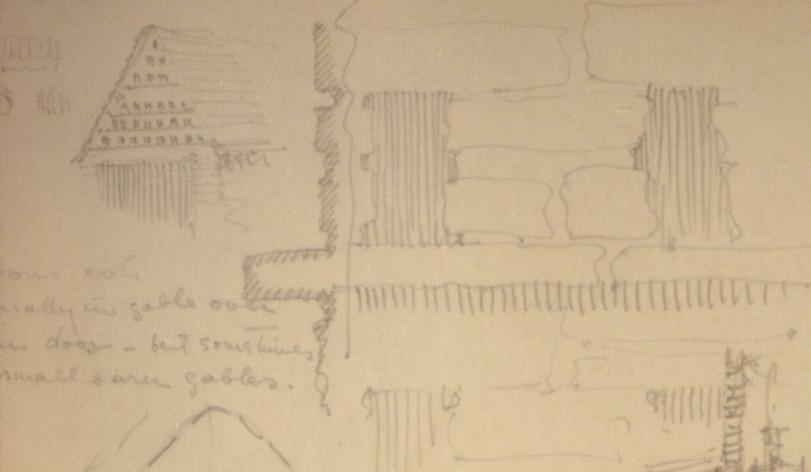
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not one piece

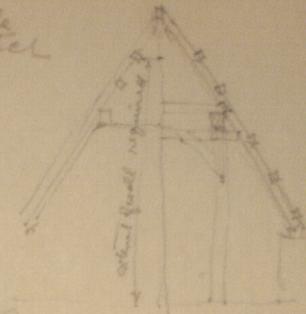




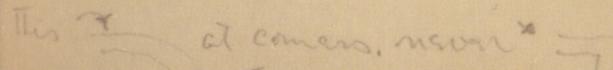




Sketch of barn gable  
may come from the Hatch  
four -

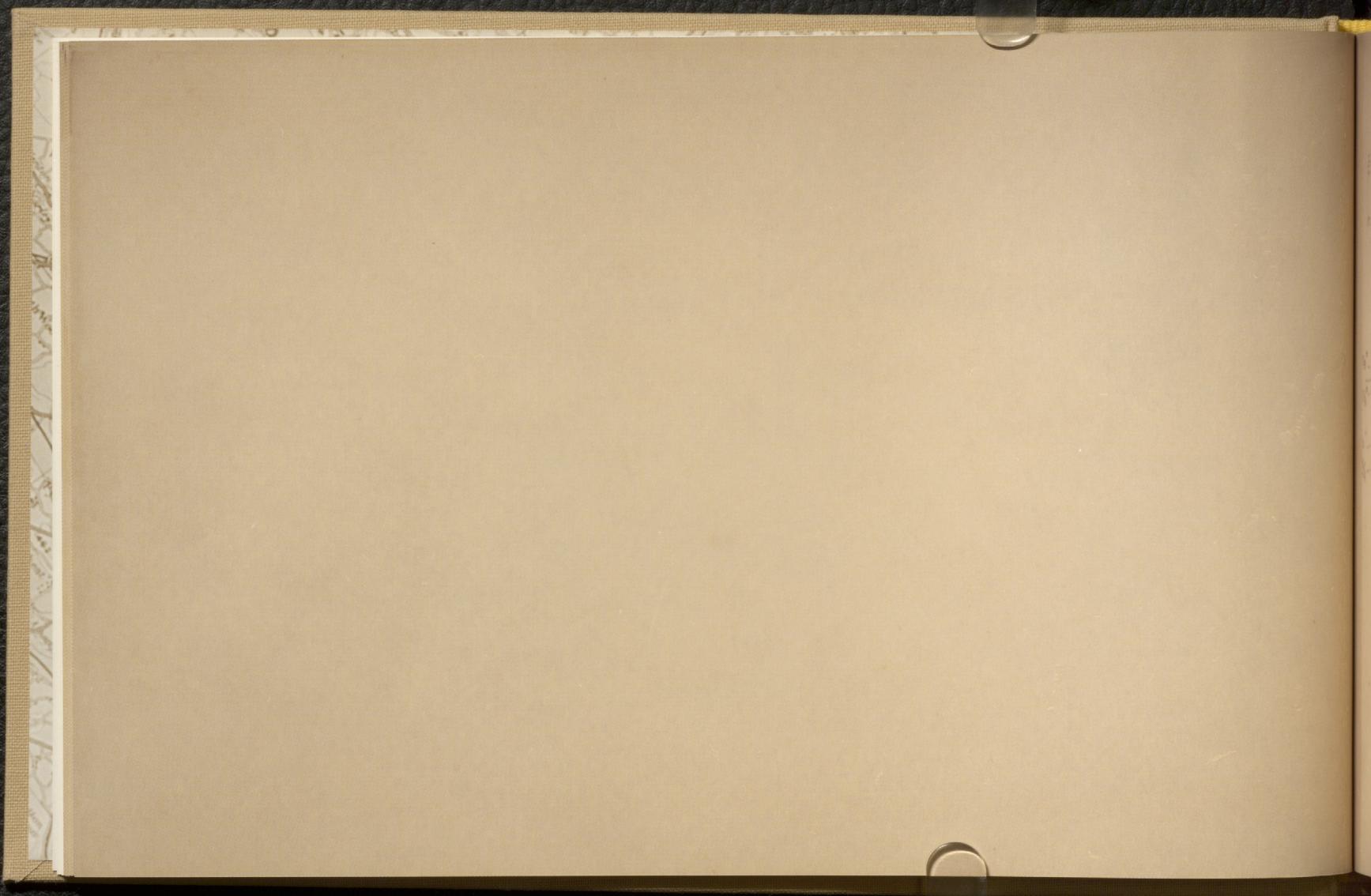


bare stone walls should always

This  at corners, never 

it is better practically on  
both sides and far superior ally

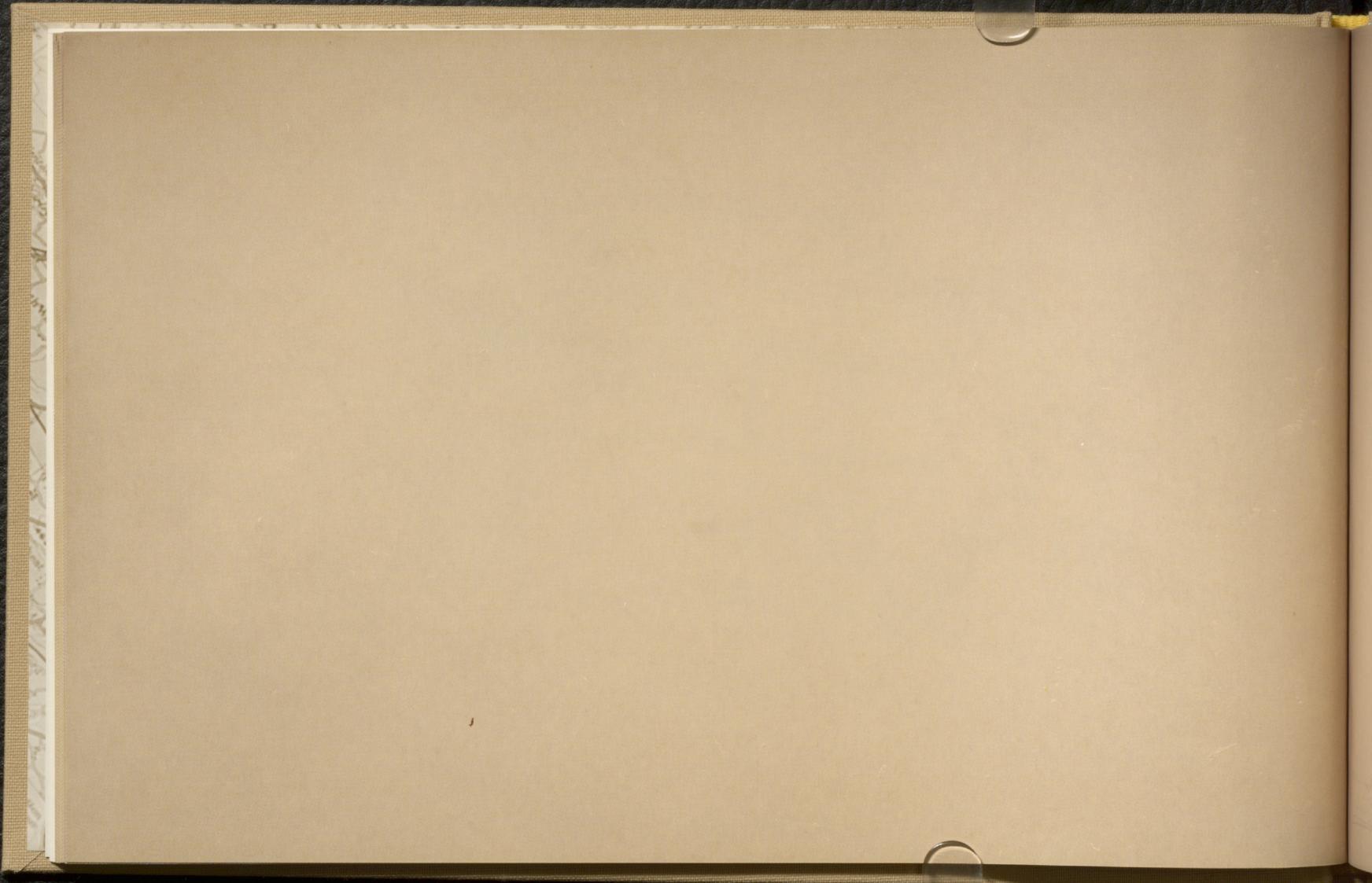
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BUREAU OF

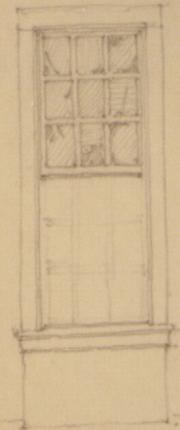
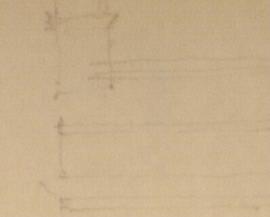


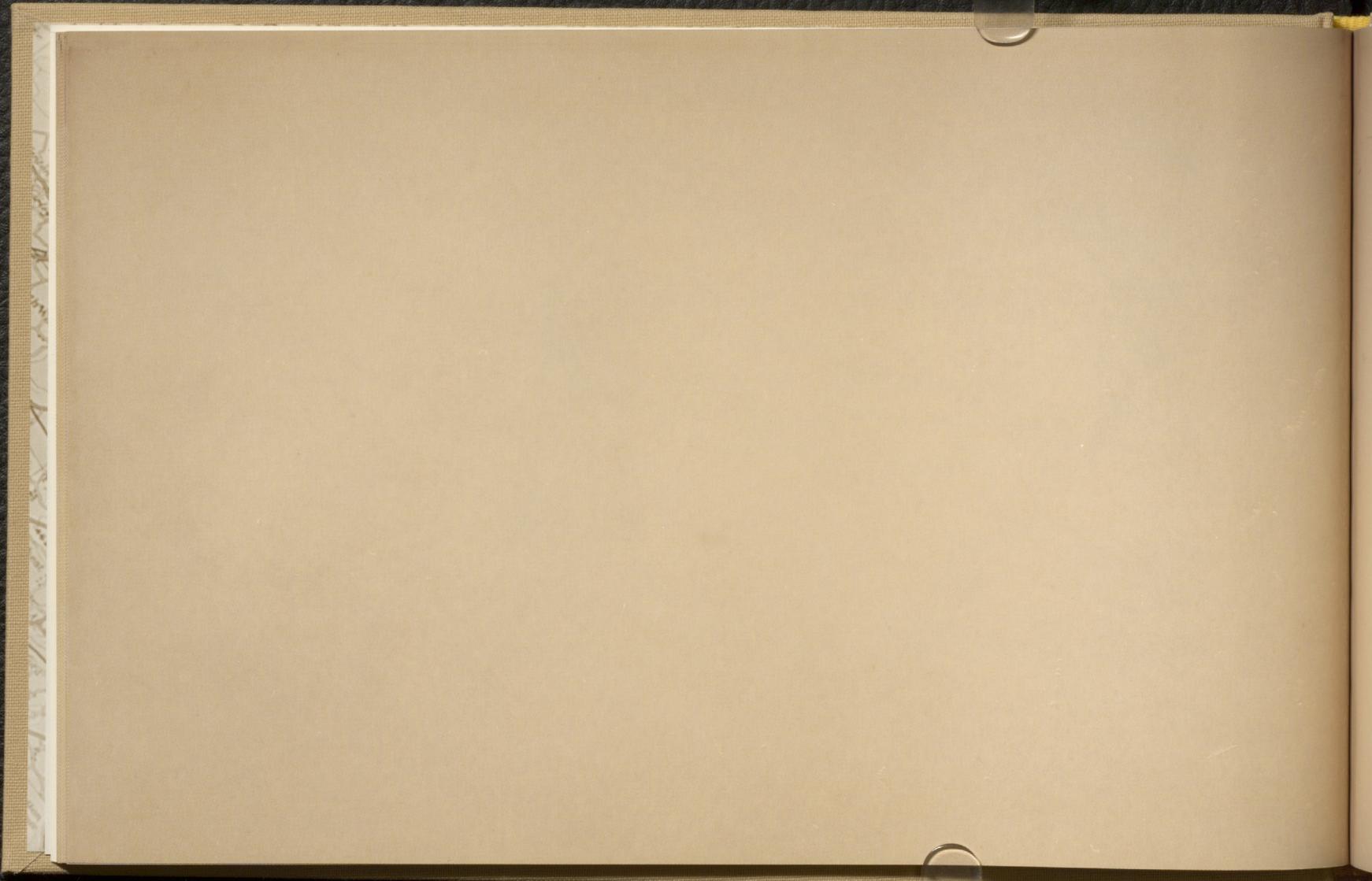


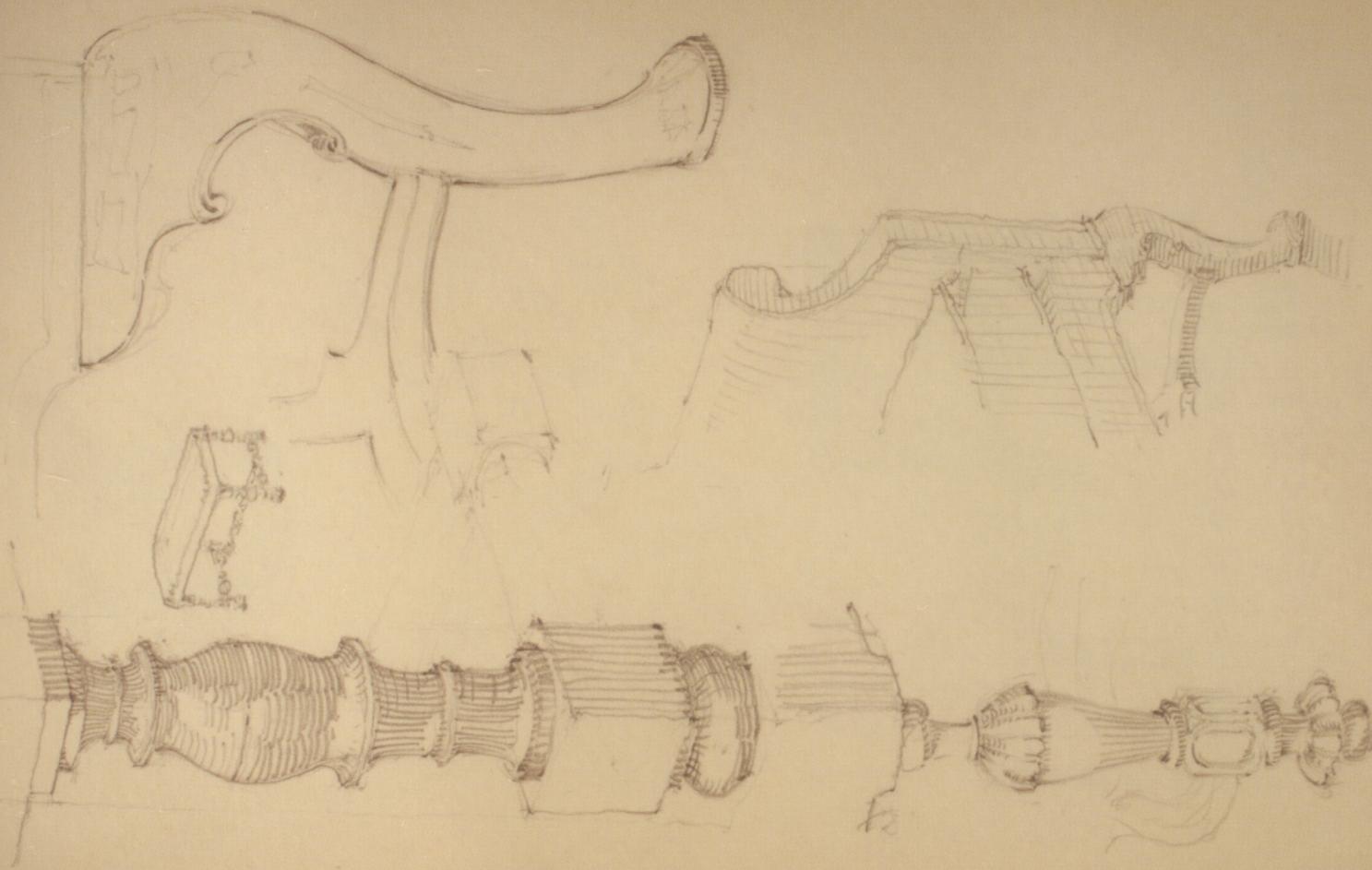




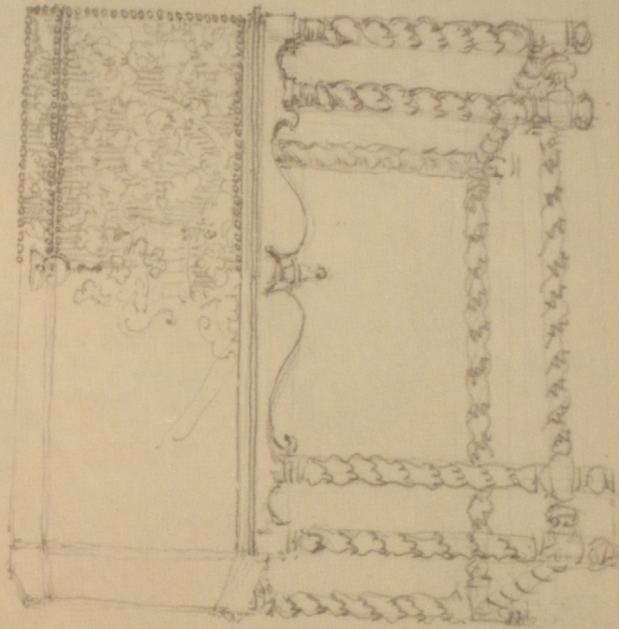
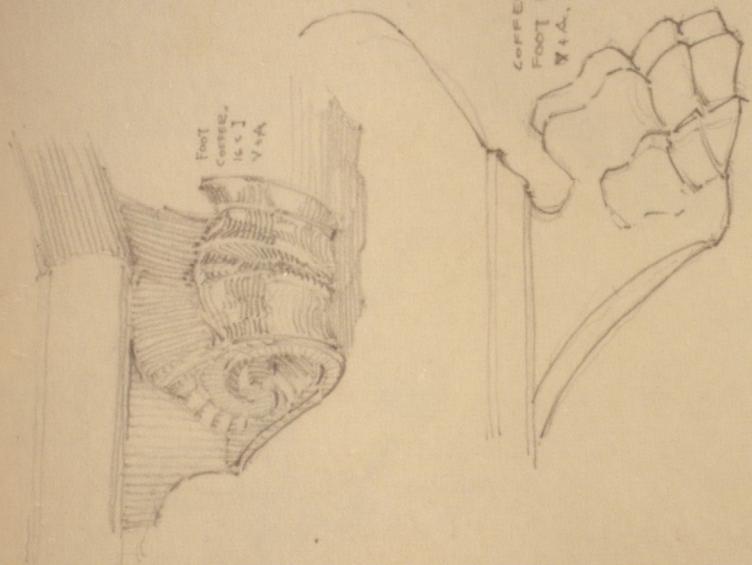
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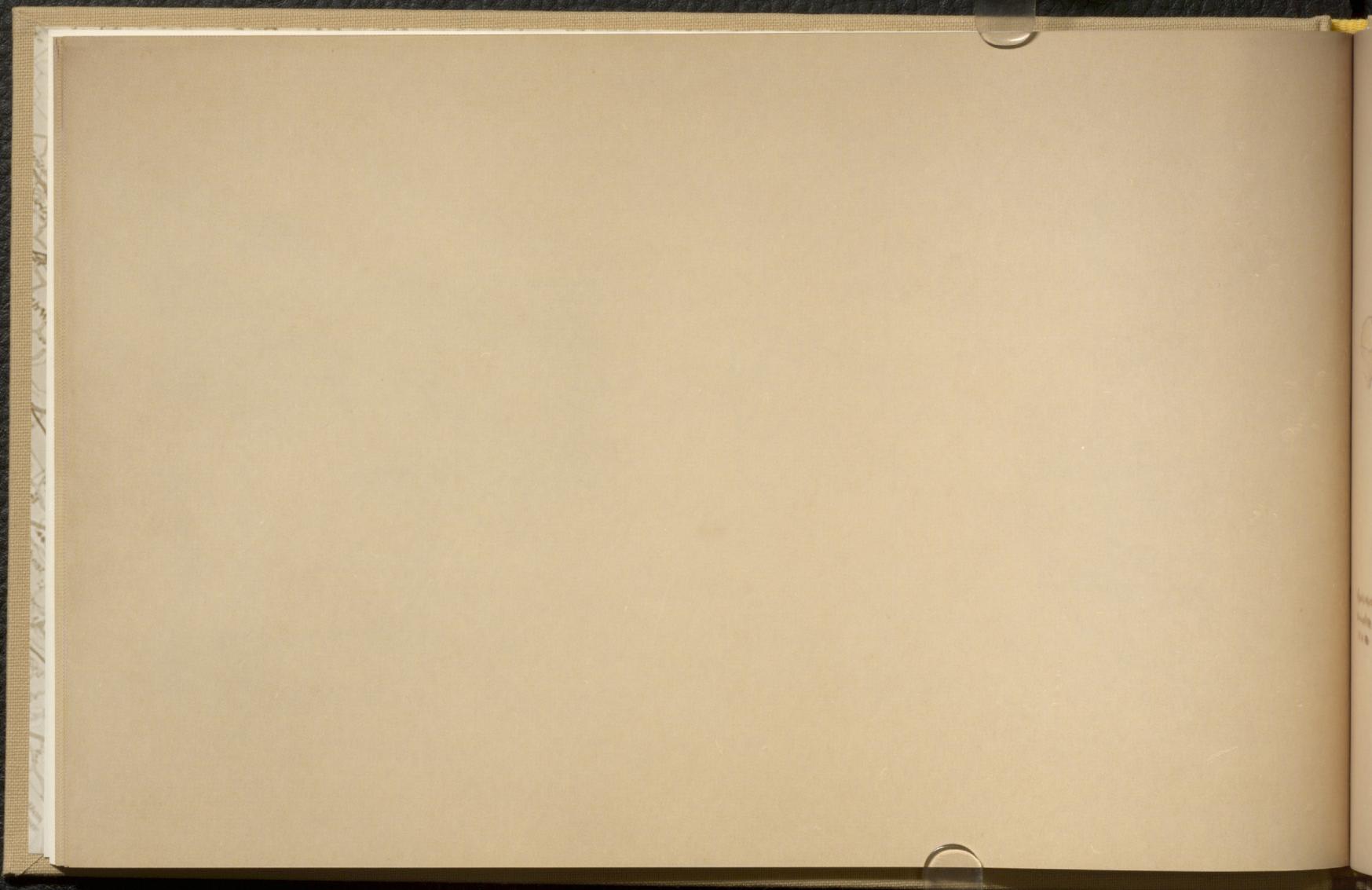




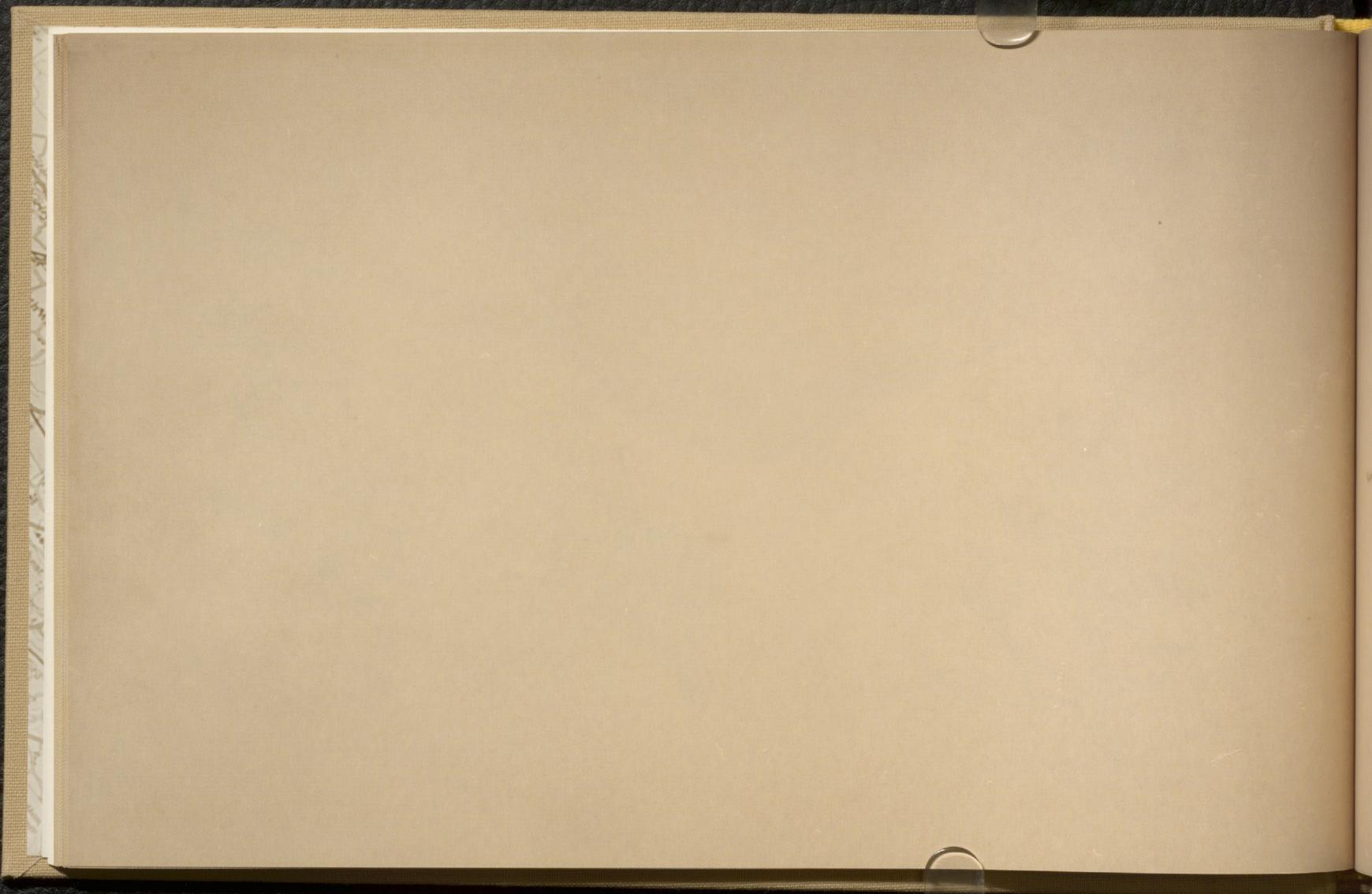


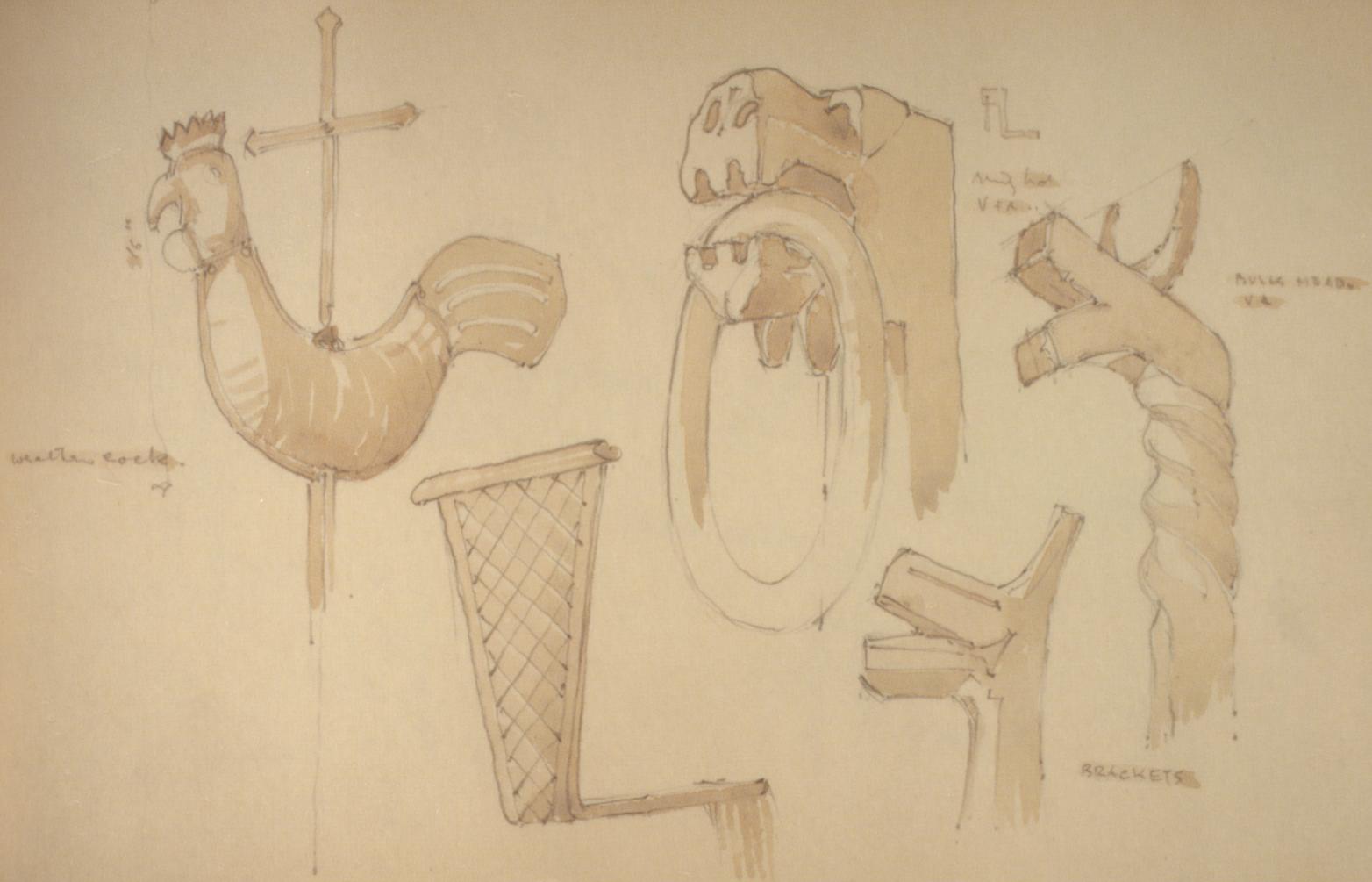












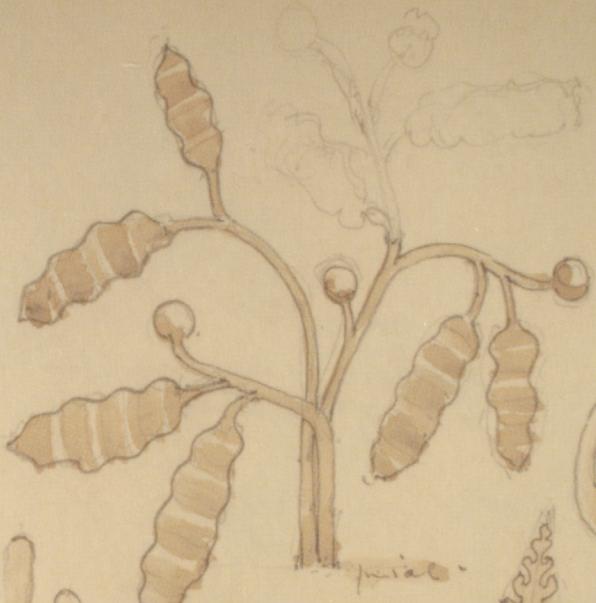




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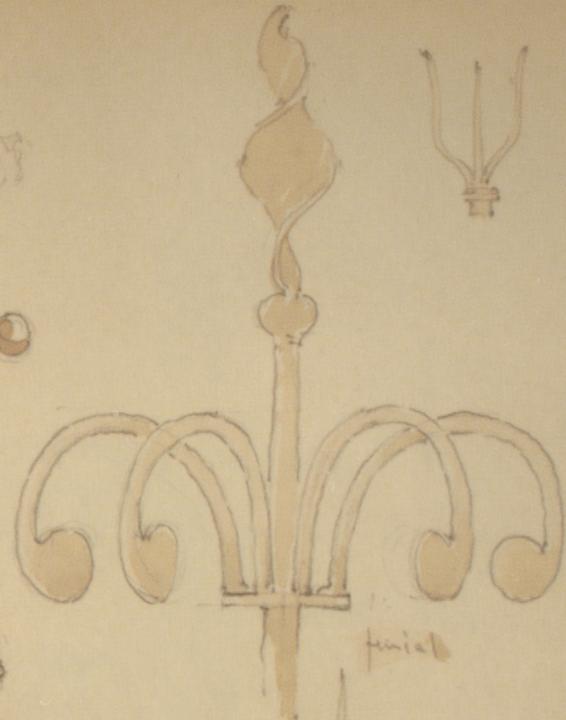
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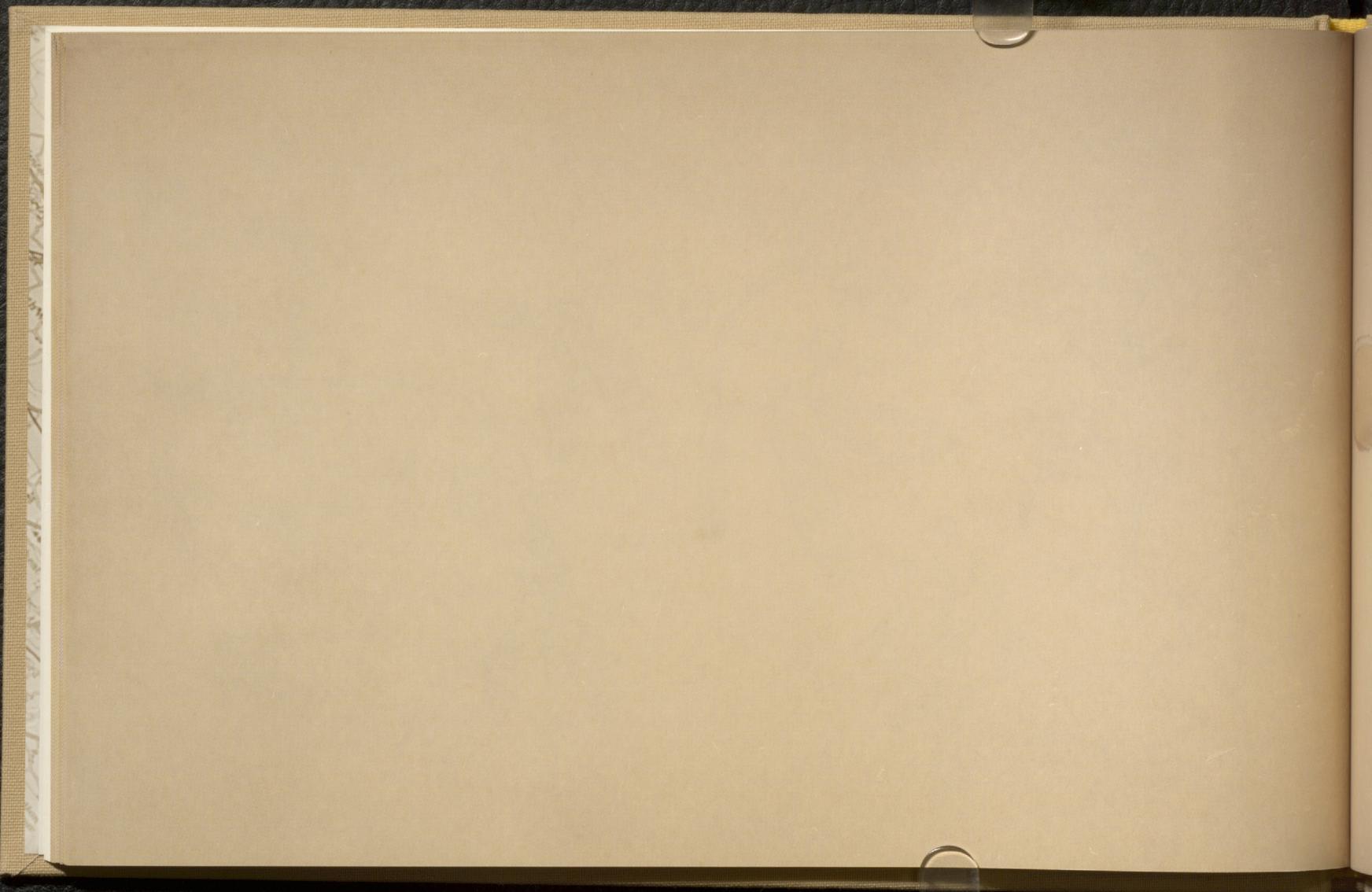


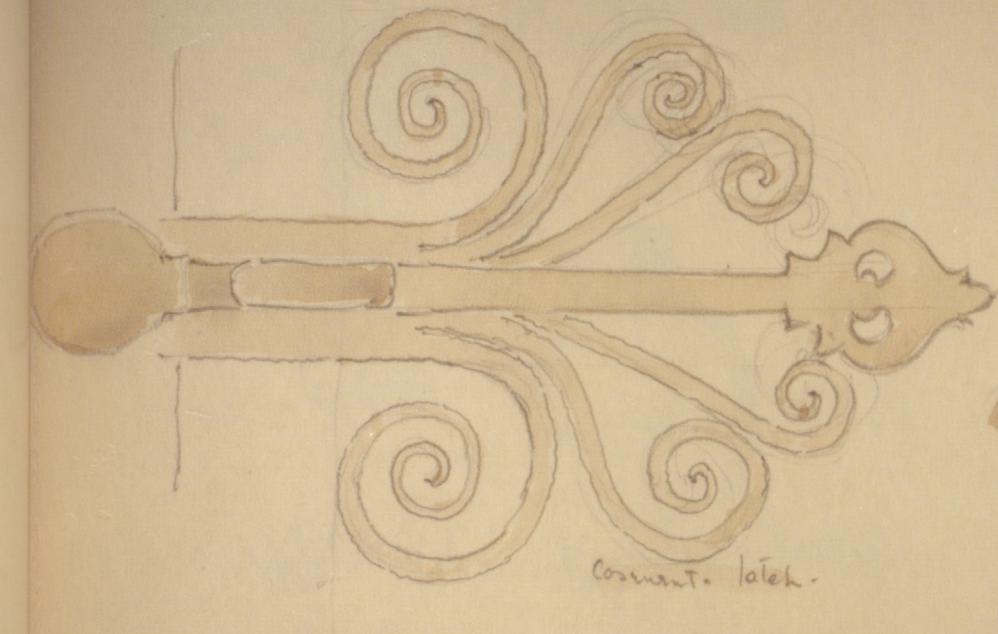
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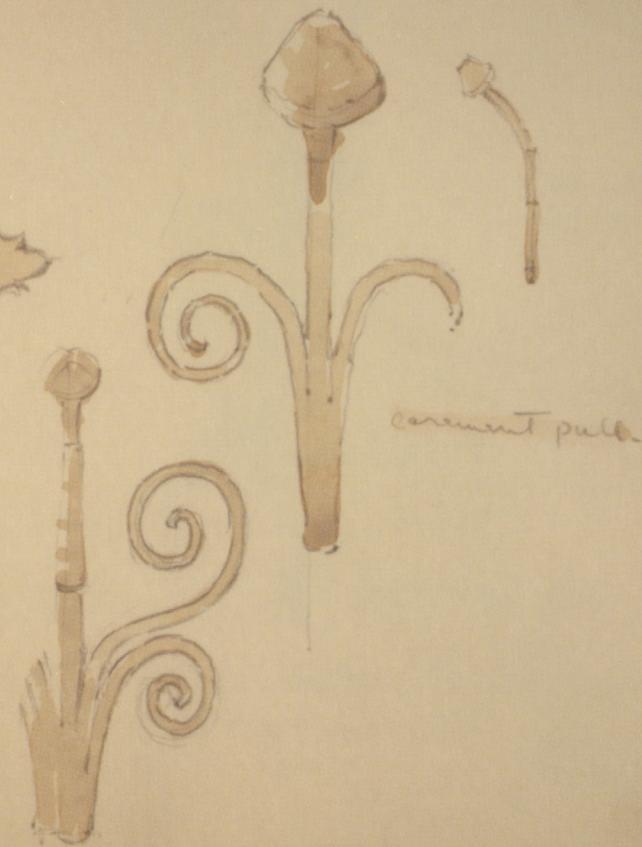
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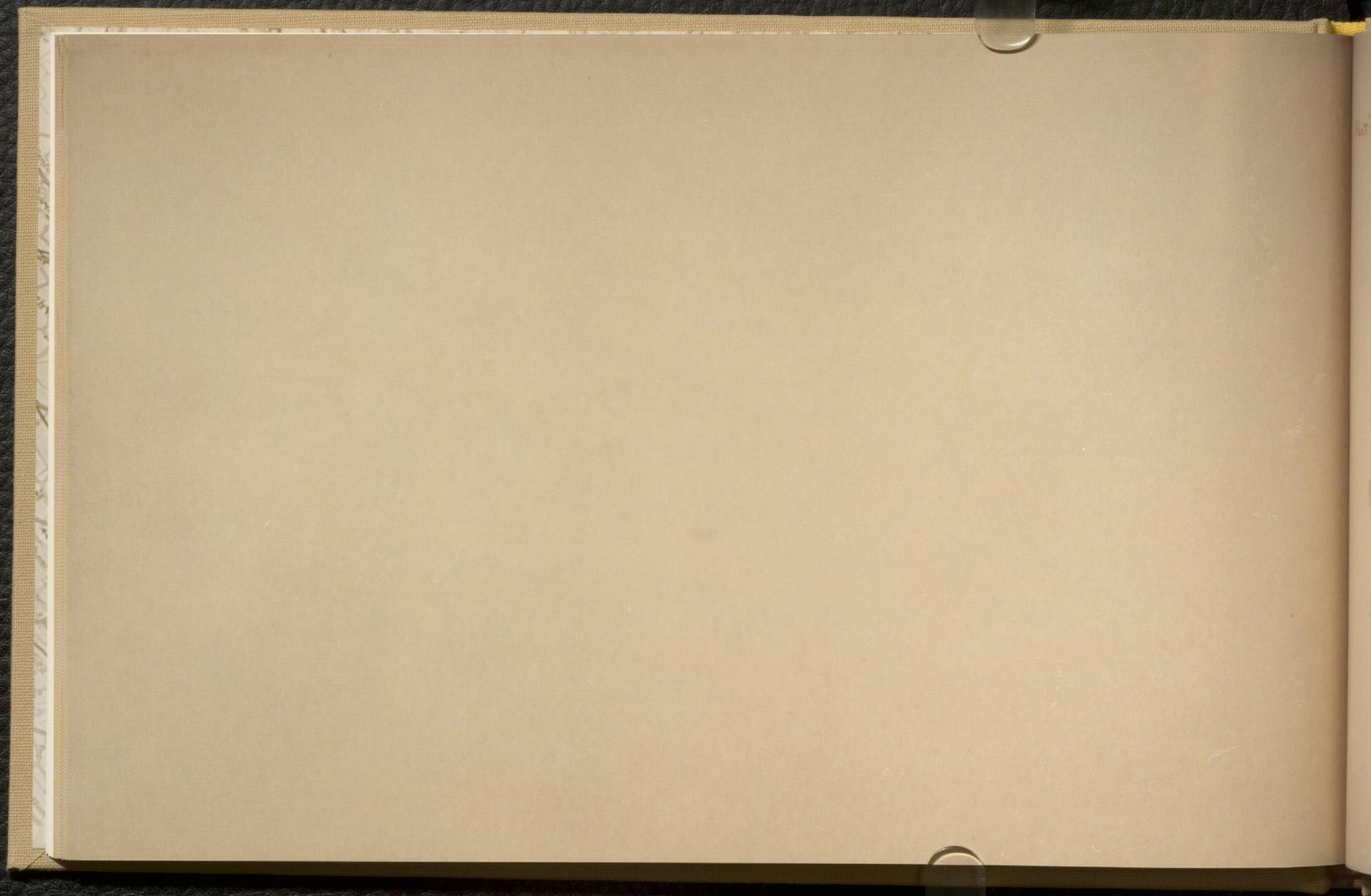


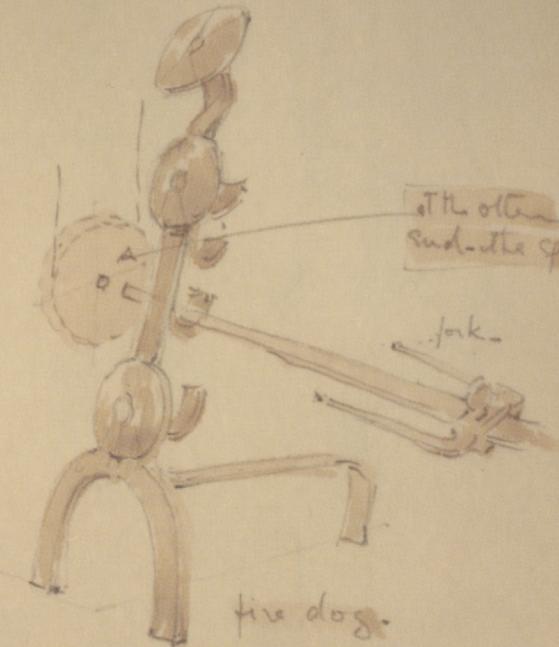
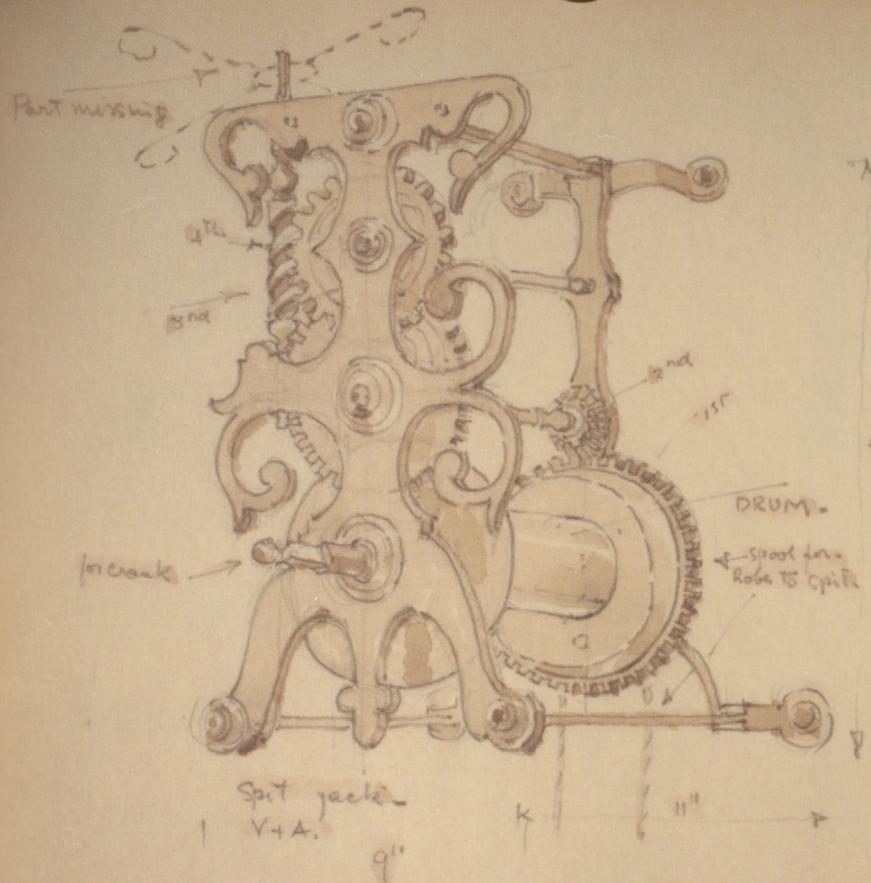


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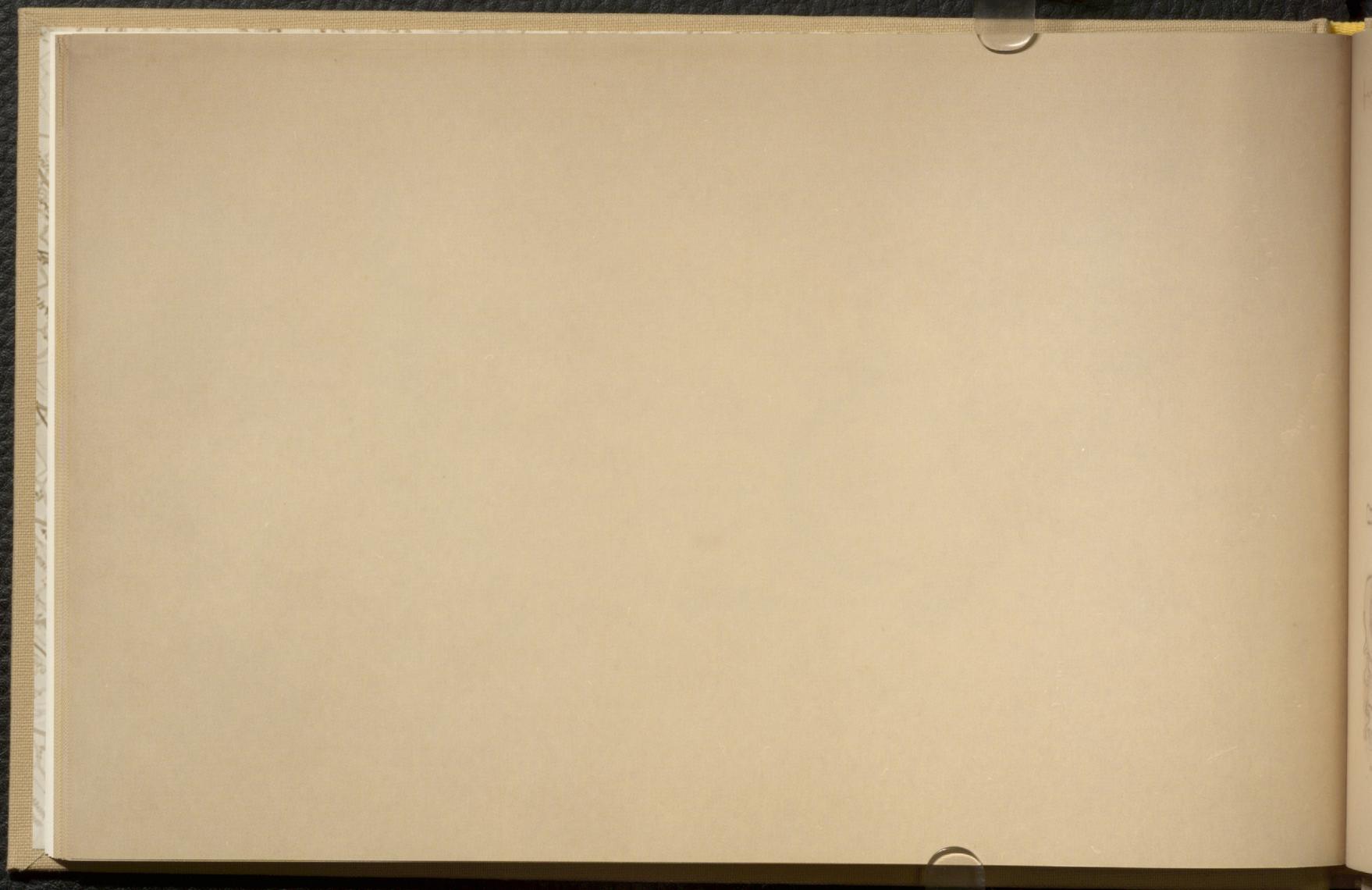


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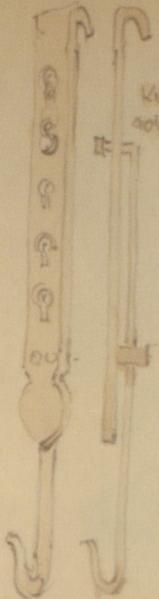
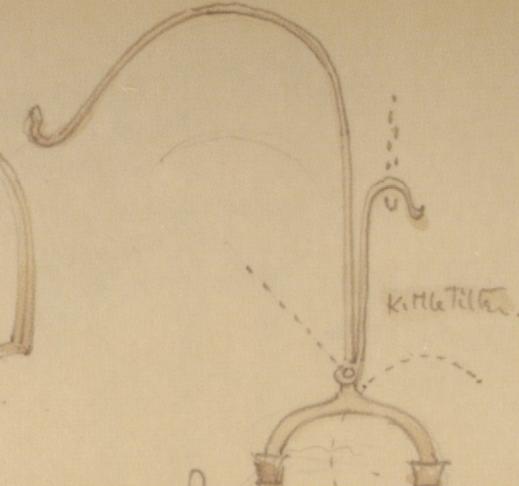
In this sketch the dogs are  
intended for the spit



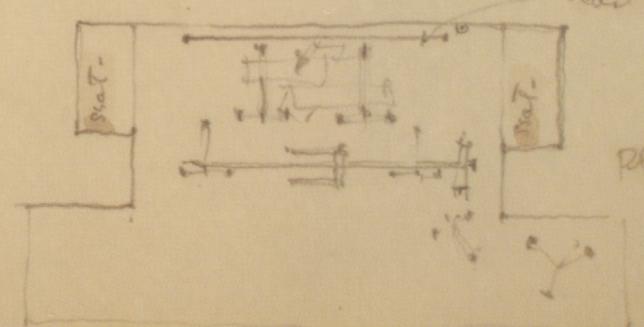
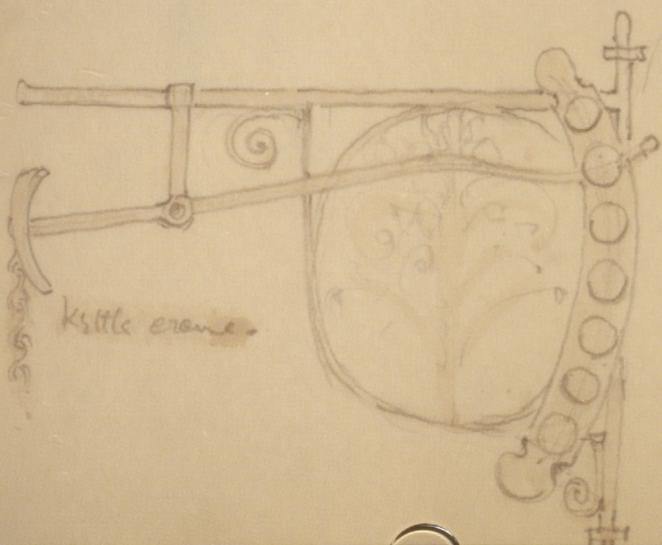
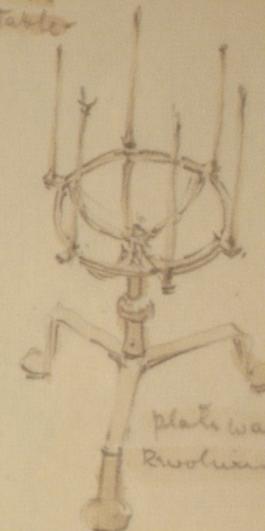
fireplace metal work



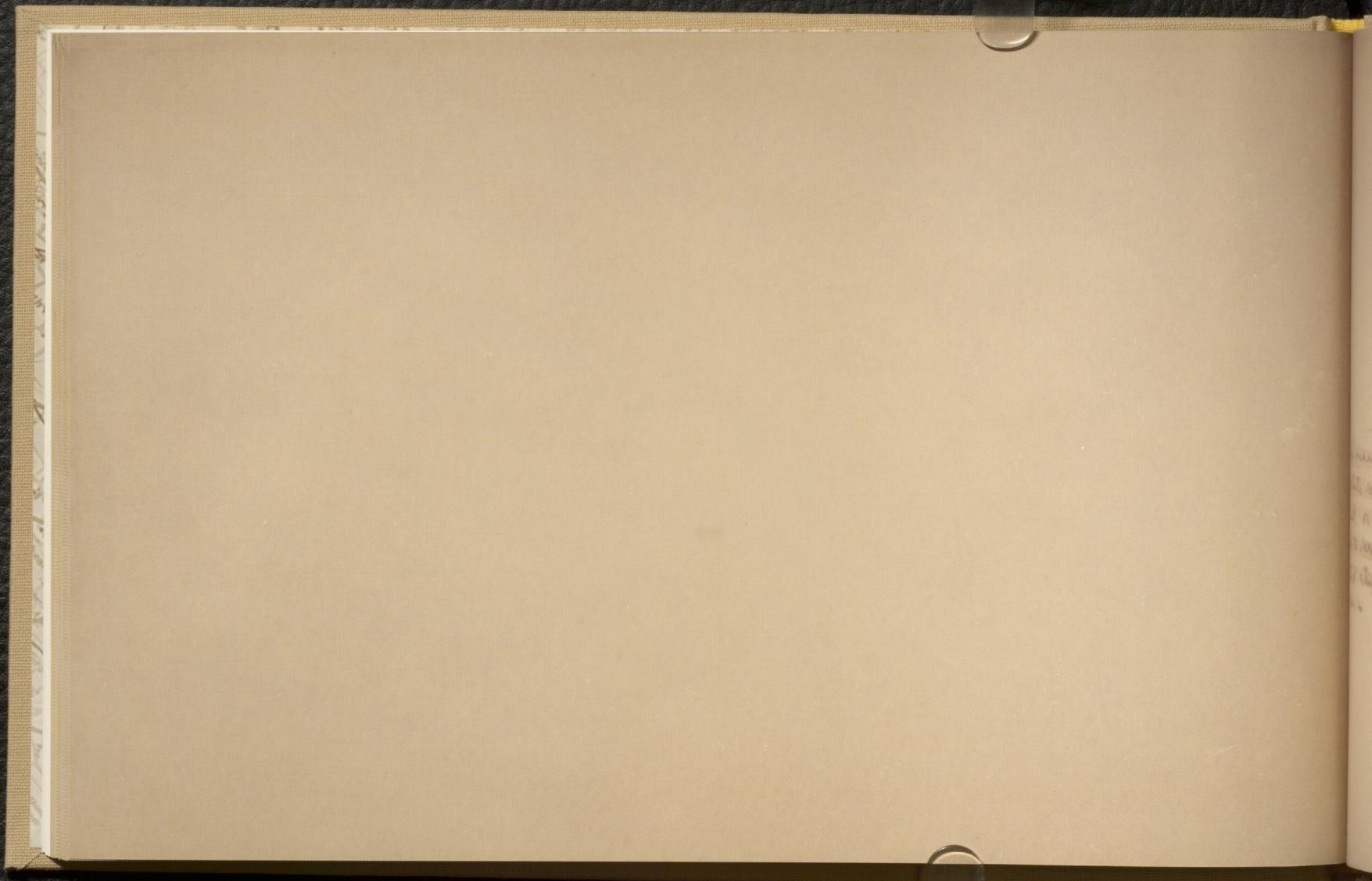
Toaster



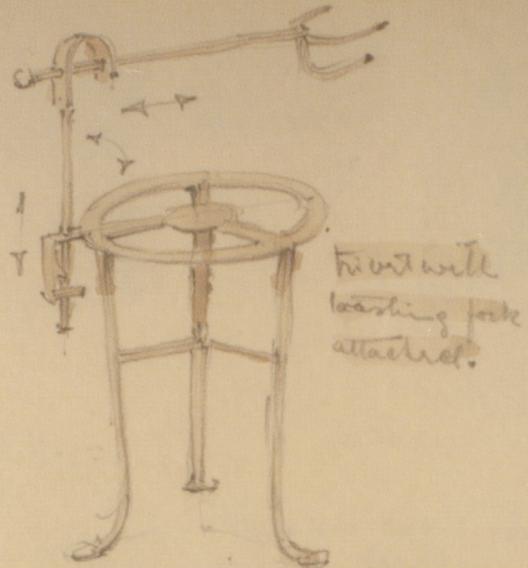
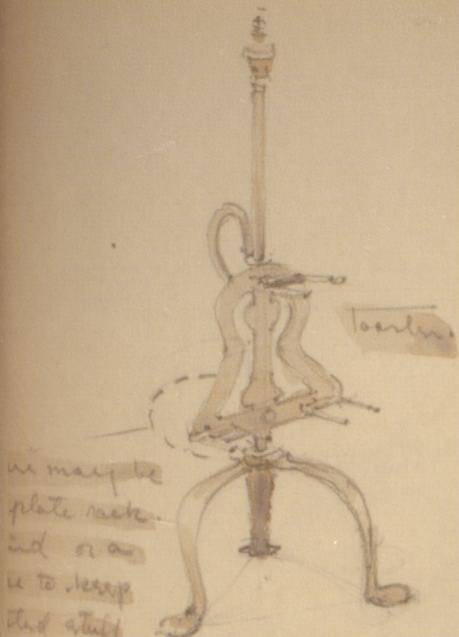
stirrup

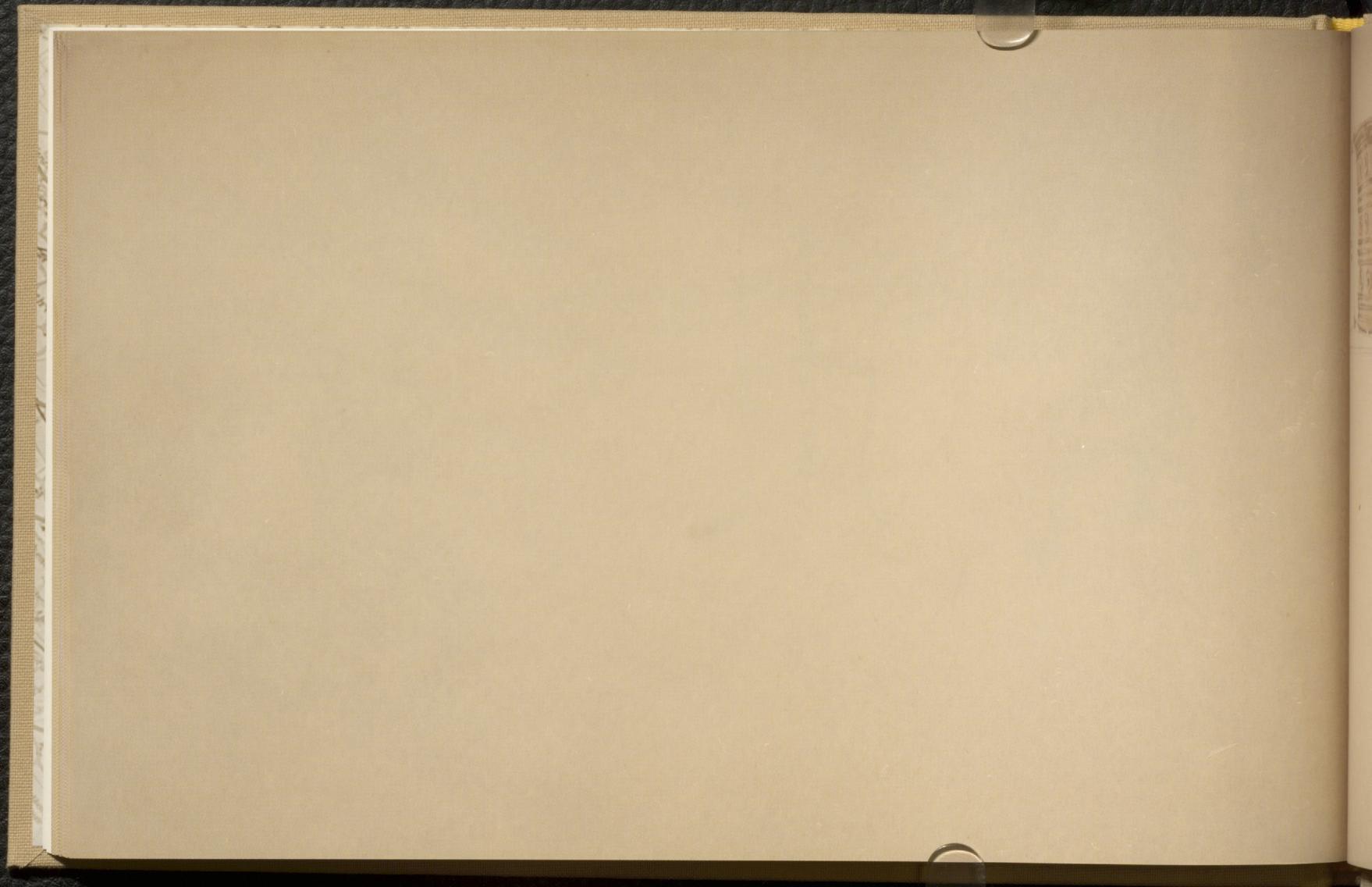


Plan of fireplace



it may be  
plate rack.  
and or an  
it to keep  
the stuff  
in.



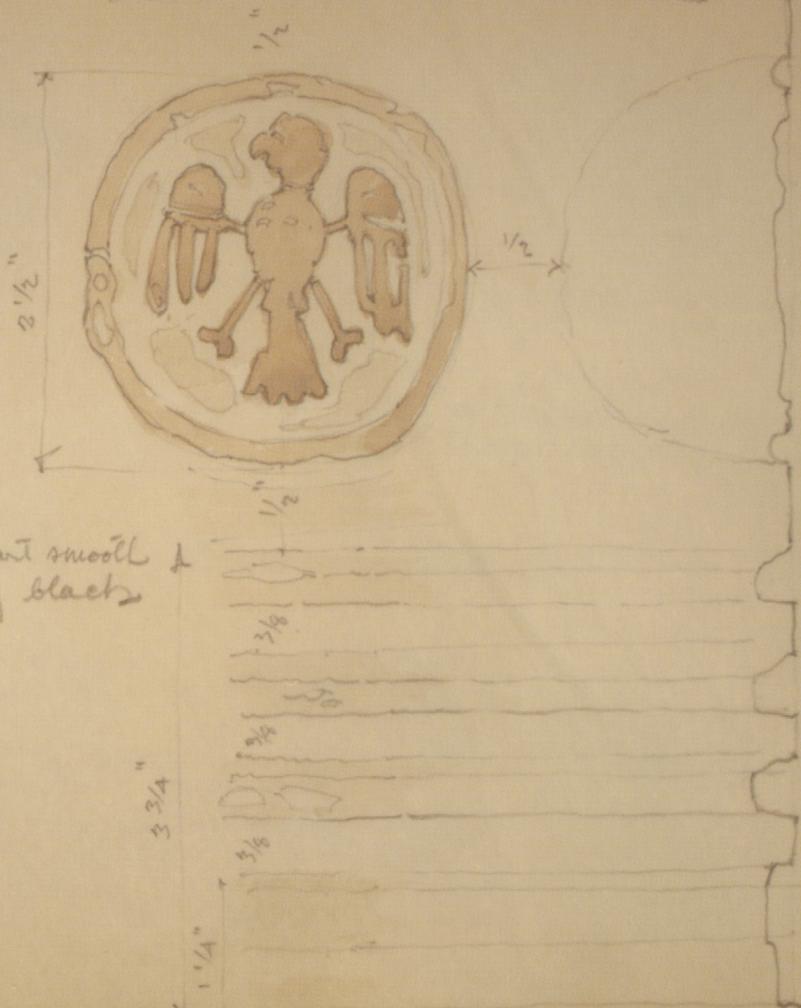


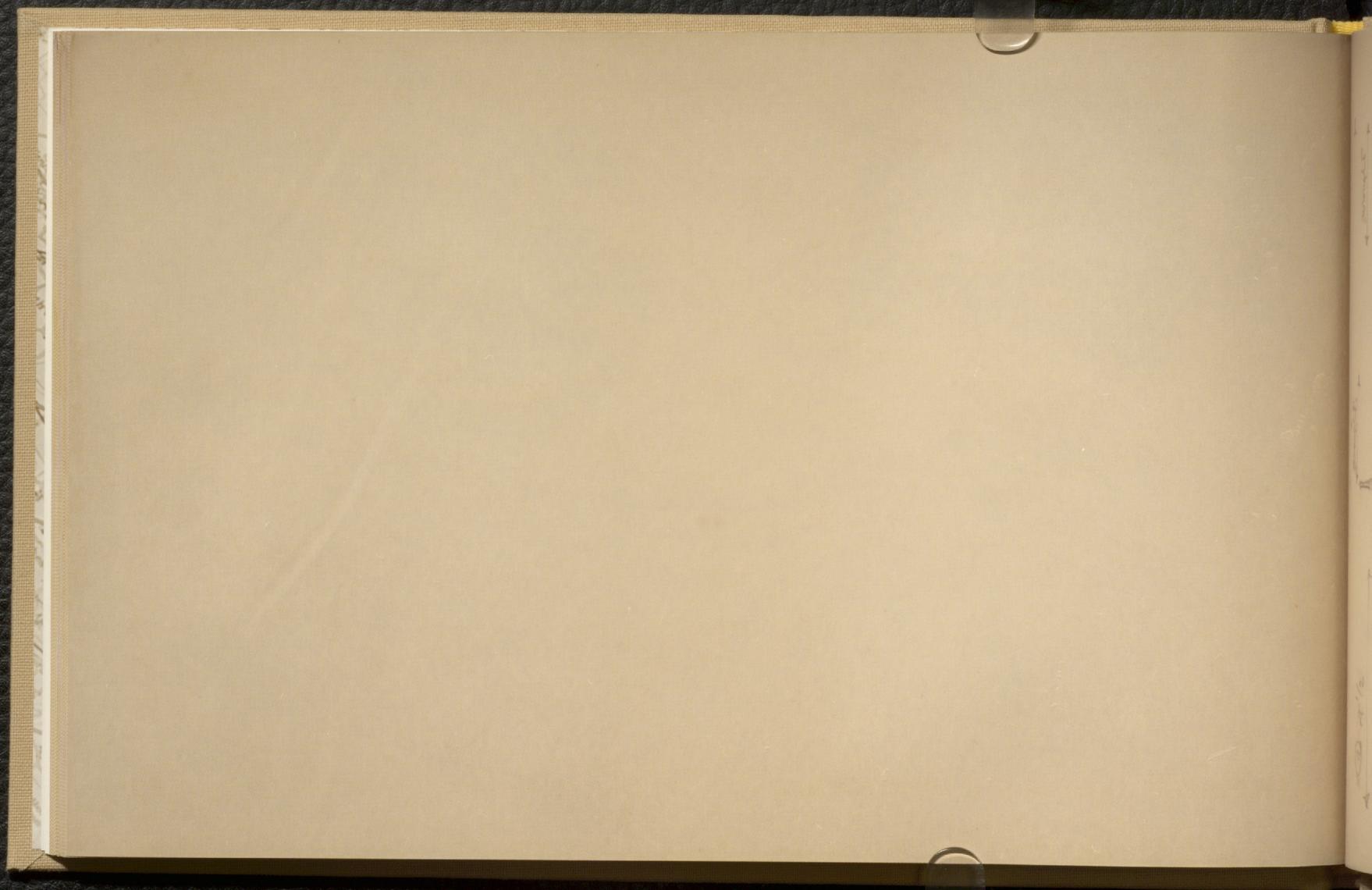


cart lead.  
Cistern  
panel 130.

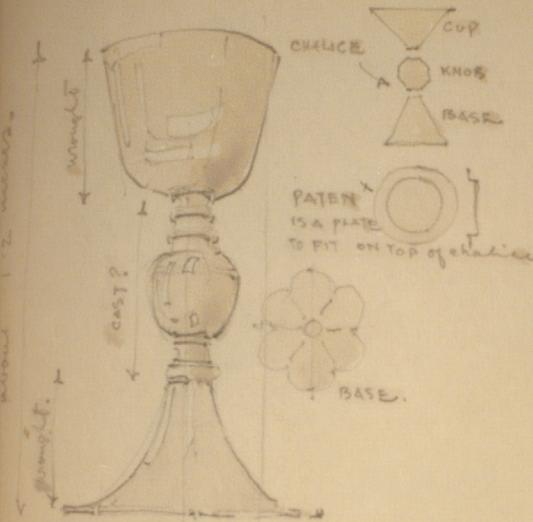


rose part smooth &  
and very black





some Ecclesiastical vessels



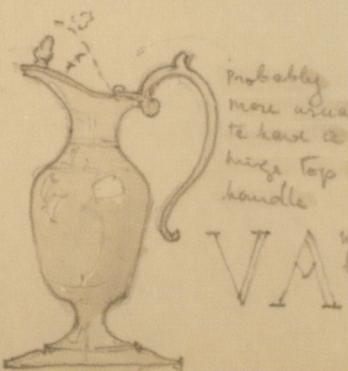
← May be an absorption engraved here  
← The cup is always plain

The bases are frequently  
heavily decorated



Pair of Mass  
CUPETS.

The corner tray  
should have a  
good size lip. It  
is used as a little  
barrel.



Probably  
more usual  
to have a  
large top and  
handle  
V A markers on  
lids.

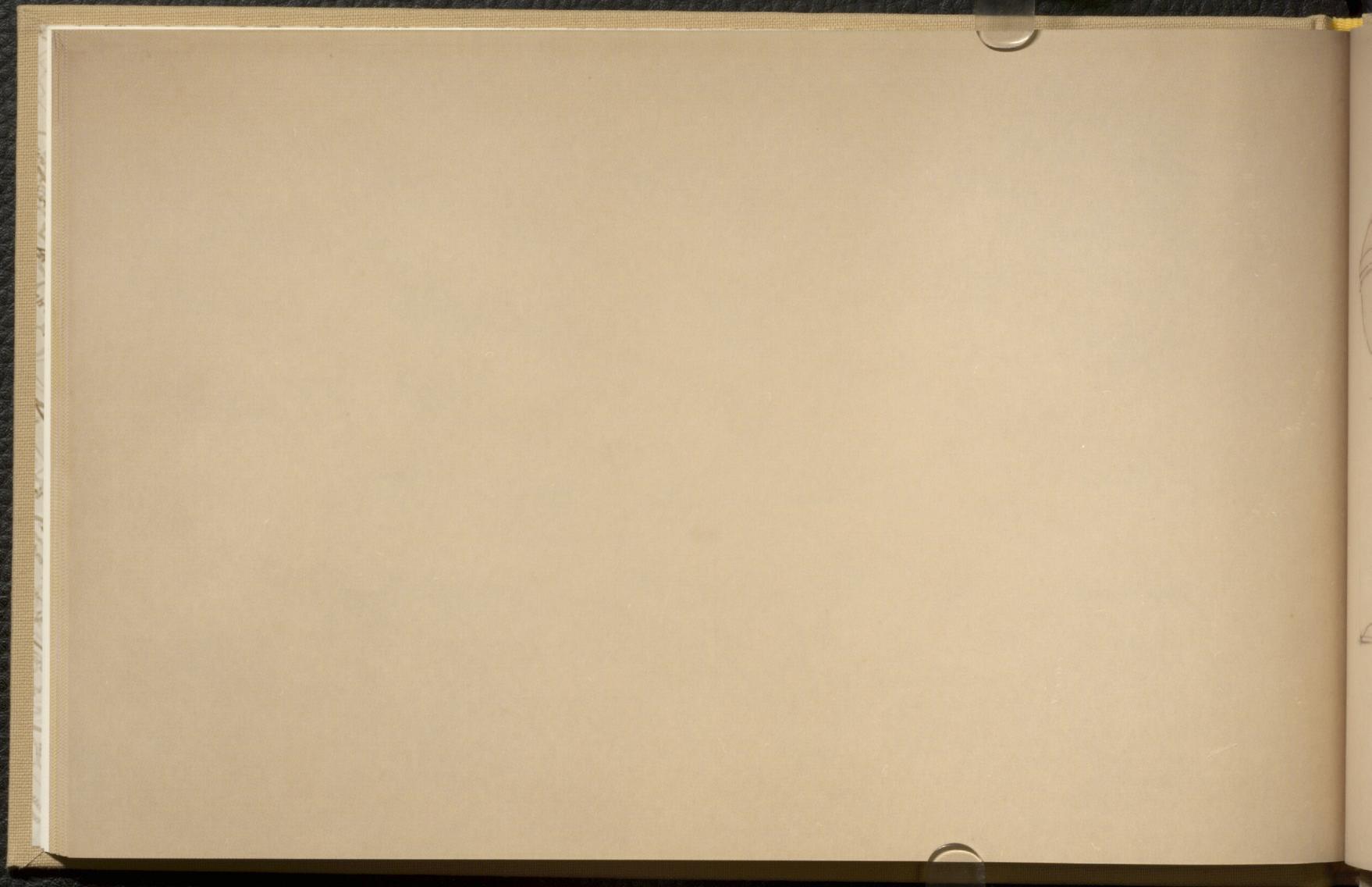


Christening a vessel  
for the 3 holy oils.

S C  
I



Sometimes this was  
and frequently in  
ordinary box either  
square or round.





PYX



water buckets are carried  
about during ceremonies  
there fore the amount of  
space



1

1/2

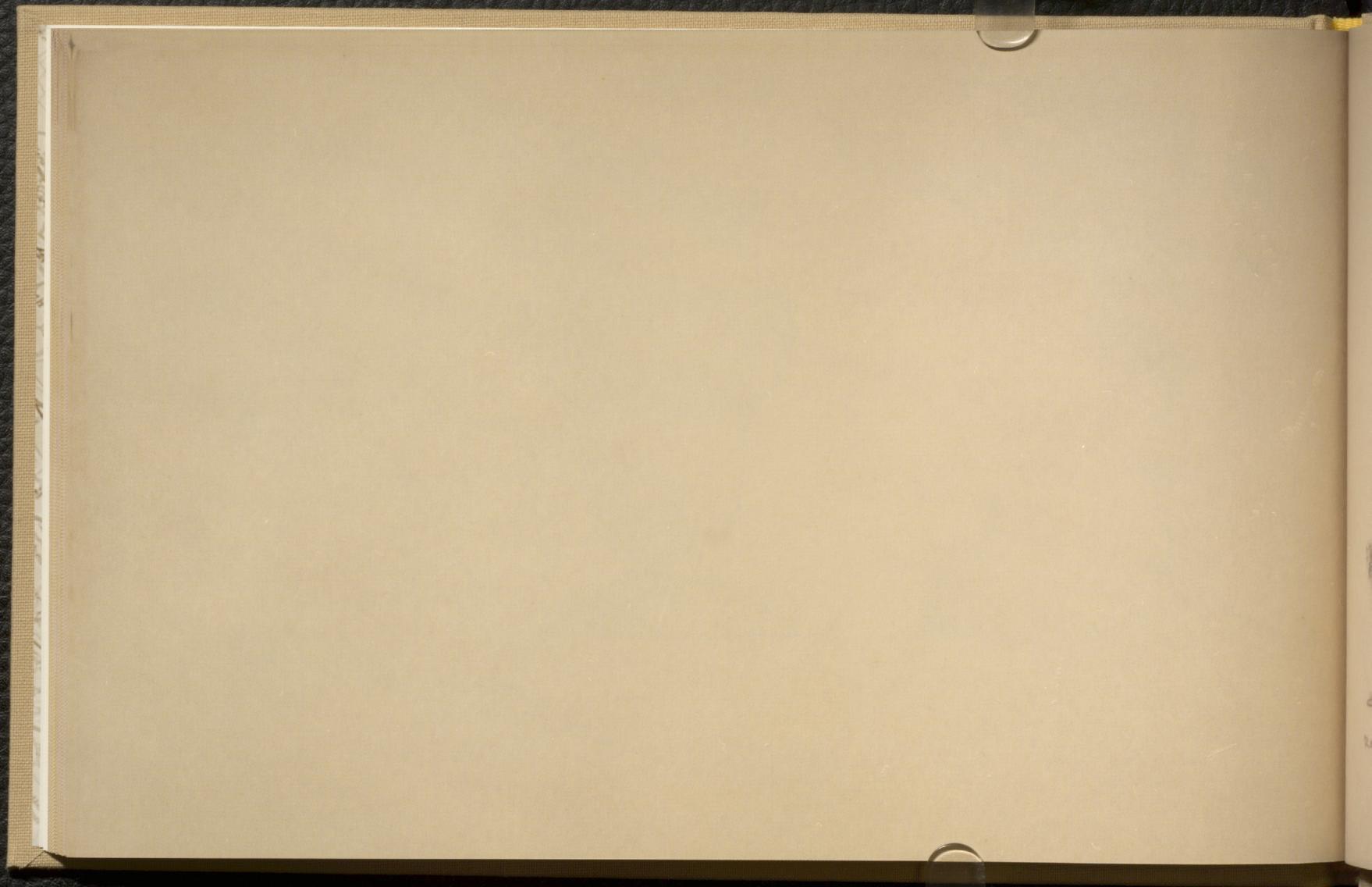
8



Sanctuary lamp



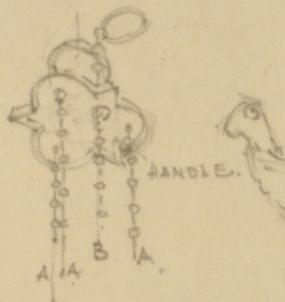
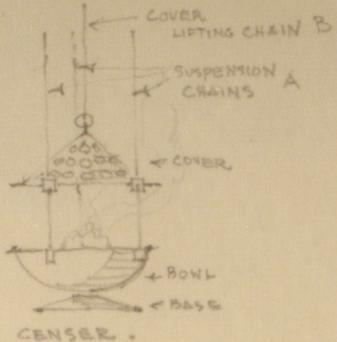
sprinkler should be  
long enough to stand up in the  
bucket the end should be made  
to collect the water.



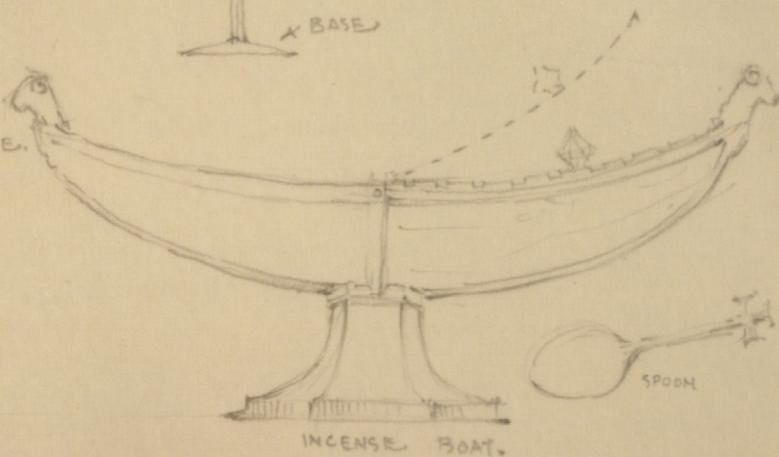
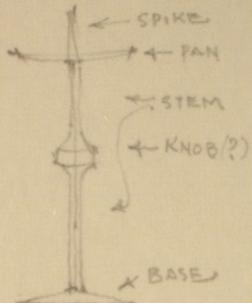
Ecclesiastical metal work

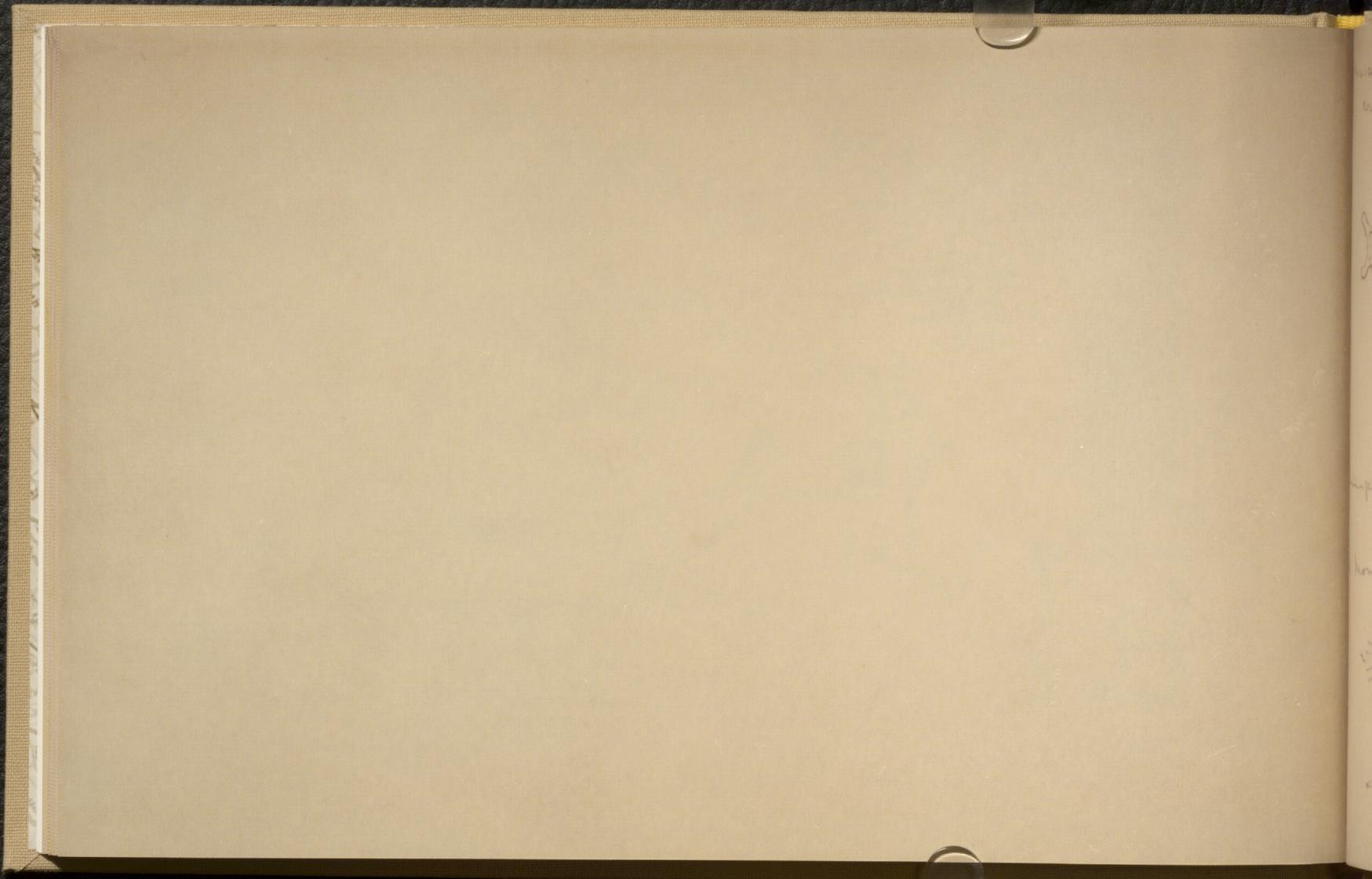


Ramsey CENSER

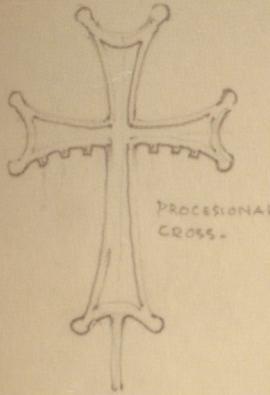


candle sticks

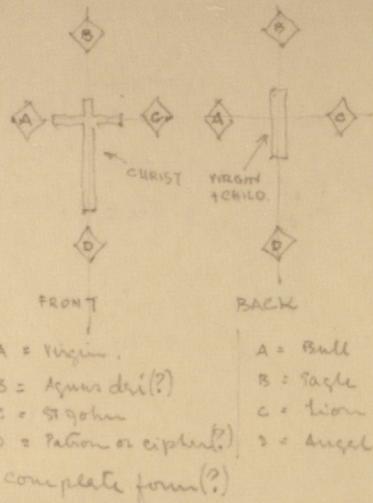




ecclesiastical metal work.  
the cross.

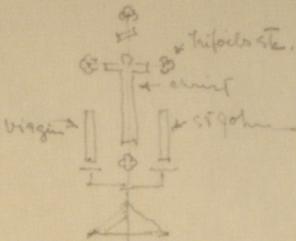
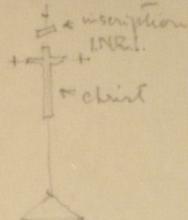


PROCESSIONAL  
CROSS.



simple form.

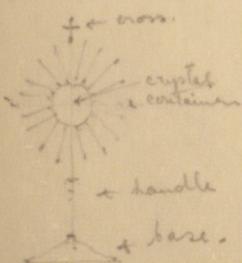
Altar crosses -



Simple form -

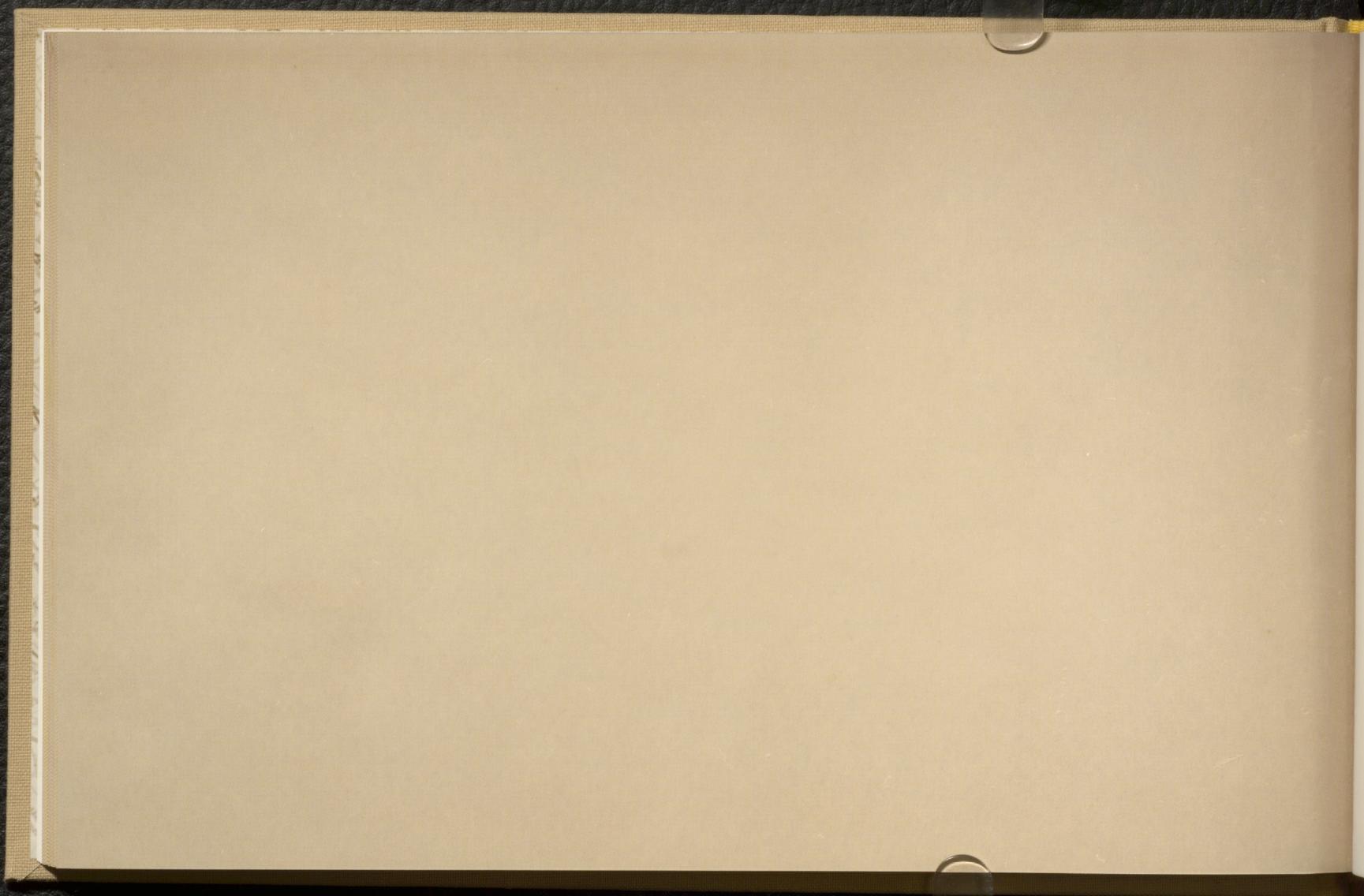
It may be hung  
or it may stand free  
or I believe it may  
be painted -

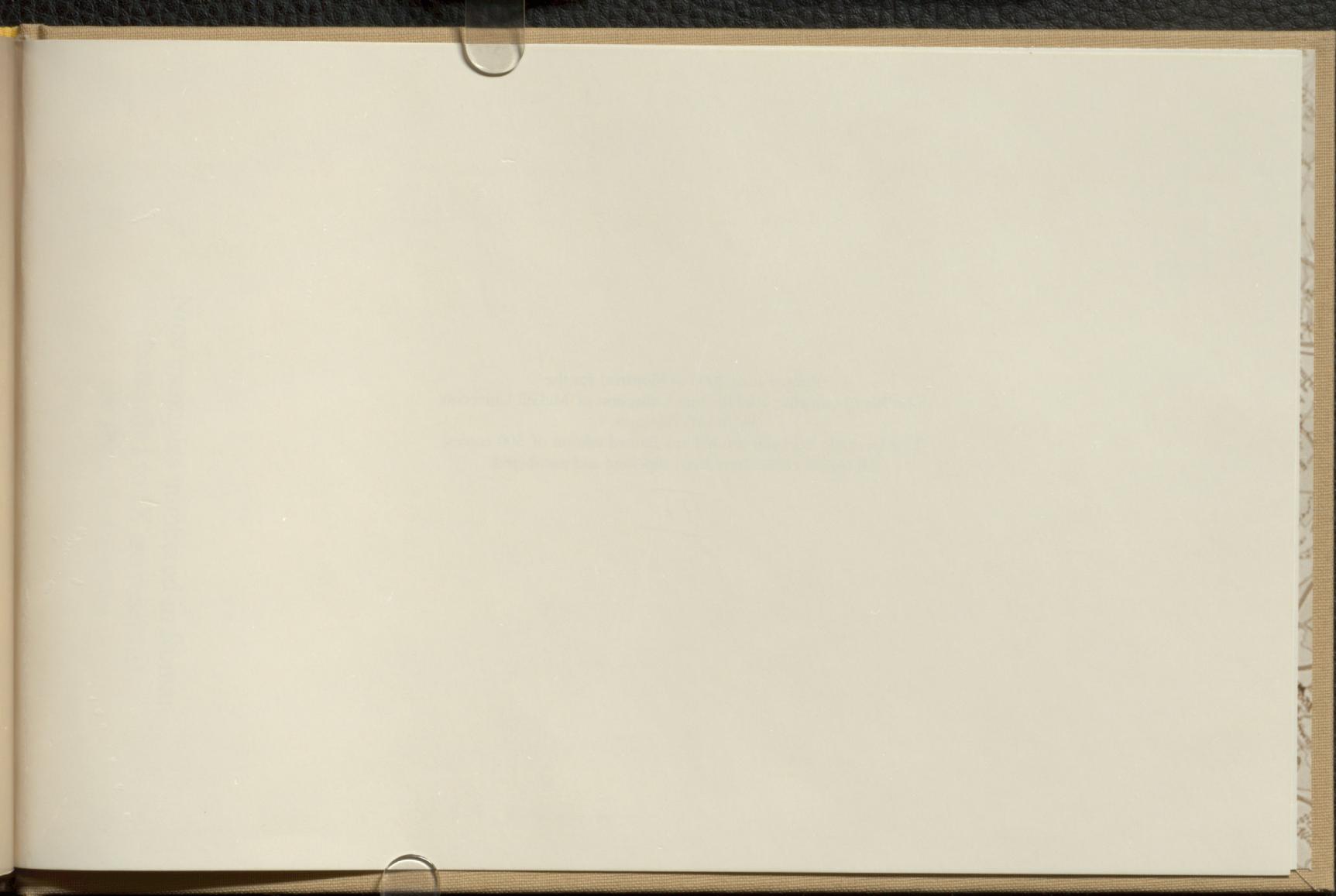
The monstrance.



The oration -  
is simply a crook.







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